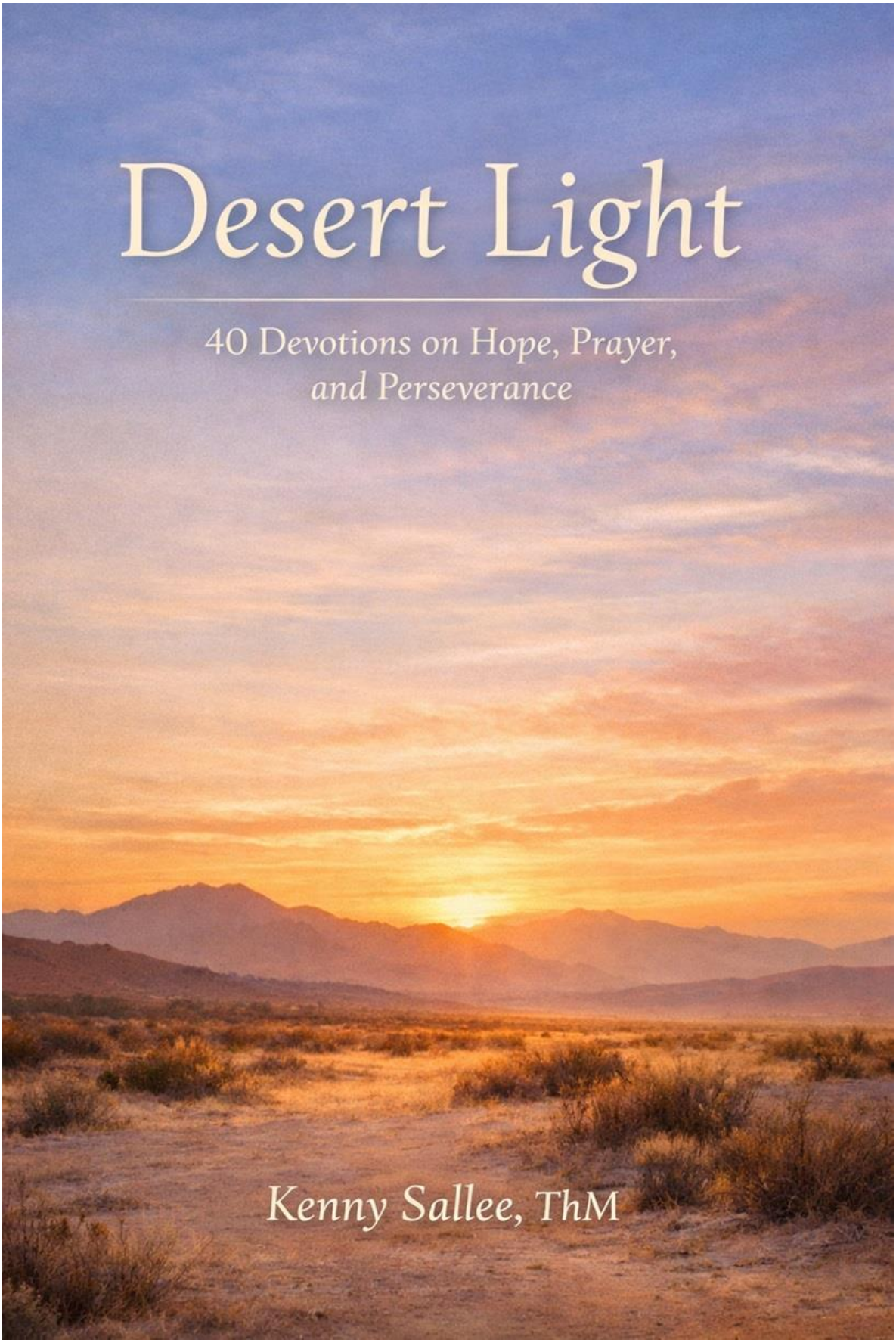
Desert Light
40 Devotions on Hope, Prayer, and Perseverance
Kenny Sallee, ThM

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by
Kenny Sallee, ThM

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Dedication

Dedicated to those who have prayed through dark nights,
walked through wilderness seasons,
and still dared to believe that morning would come.

Epigraph

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.”

— Hebrews 10:23, NRSVCE

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Introduction

Life rarely unfolds in a straight, untroubled line.

It moves in seasons. Some are bright with joy and clarity. Others are shadowed by grief, weariness, uncertainty, or the slow ache of waiting. There are seasons when faith feels strong and radiant, when prayer comes easily, and when hope rises almost naturally with the morning light. There are other seasons when the road seems longer, the answers fewer, and the heart must learn to trust God one more day without the comfort of clear sight.

This book was gathered for those kinds of roads.

Desert Light was not written for people who have mastered the Christian life. It was written for those who are still walking. It was written for those who know what it is to carry unanswered questions, to pray through the dark, to begin again after disappointment, to endure with imperfect but sincere faith, and to keep turning their faces toward God even when the way ahead feels uncertain. If you have ever found yourself holding on by grace more than by strength, then you already understand the spirit in which these pages were written.

The Christian life is often described with words like belief, doctrine, worship, obedience, or discipleship, and all of those words are true and necessary. But beneath them all lies something deeply personal and deeply human: relationship. At its heart, the life of faith is not simply a system to be learned or a code to be followed. It is a life lived with God. It is the long, often quiet journey of learning to trust Him more fully, love Him more deeply, listen to Him more attentively, and recognize His presence not only in the obvious moments of blessing, but also in the wilderness stretches where His work feels hidden.

That is why the themes of this book are hope, prayer, perseverance, and returning light.

Hope is not wishful thinking. It is not the denial of sorrow, nor the naive assumption that every hard thing will quickly resolve itself. Christian hope is sturdier than that. It is rooted in the character of God. It is the refusal to believe that pain has the final word. It is the quiet but holy conviction that even in the ashes, even in the delay, even in the pit, prison, desert, or waiting room, God remains faithful. Hope often grows best in hard soil. It learns to live not by constant emotional certainty, but by the steady trust that God is at work even when His work cannot yet be seen.

Prayer is how we keep returning to that trust.

Prayer is not reserved for polished moments or well-ordered hearts. It belongs just as much to the tired, the grieving, the confused, and the afraid. It is the language of dependence. Sometimes it rises as praise. Sometimes it comes as confession. Sometimes it is little more than a sigh, a plea, a whispered “Lord, help me,” or the silence of a soul too burdened for many words. But whatever form it takes, prayer is the turning of the heart toward God. It is the refusal to let suffering have the only voice. It is the practice of remaining in relationship, even when we do not fully understand what God is doing.

Perseverance is what grows in that place.

There is much in modern life that trains us to expect immediate results, quick clarity, and visible progress. But much of discipleship unfolds more slowly than that. Spiritual growth is often hidden work. It happens through repeated obediences, small acts of faithfulness, daily returns to prayer, quiet refusals to give in, and the thousand ordinary ways a soul learns to remain with God instead of drifting away. Perseverance is rarely glamorous. It often looks like getting up again, praying again, forgiving again, trusting again, and taking the next step without needing to see the whole path. Yet that hidden faithfulness matters more than we often realize. God wastes none of it.

Then, in ways we do not always expect, light begins to return.

Sometimes it comes dramatically. More often it comes gently: as a softening of fear, a word of comfort received at the right moment, a burden that feels a little lighter, a prayer that rises more freely, a wound that no longer governs the whole heart, or the first quiet sense that dawn is nearer than it once seemed. Returning light does not always announce itself with certainty. It may begin as a glimmer, a thin line at the horizon, a small grace in an ordinary day. But once it begins, we realize that God has been at work all along. The light was on its way before we knew how to name it.

These devotions were written from within that landscape.

Some were shaped by Scripture. Some were stirred by the witness of history. Some arose from reflection on ordinary life, seasonal rhythms, and the long road of Christian discipleship. All of them were written with the conviction that God meets His people in real places—in hospital waiting rooms, on desert roads, at kitchen tables, in churches, in grief, in old age, in fatigue, in repentance, in questions, in service, and in the unnoticed moments where daily faith is actually lived.

You will find in these pages meditations on wilderness and waiting, on courage and confession, on suffering and mercy, on perseverance and peace, on truth, trust, prayer, and the gracious nearness of Christ. Some reflections may meet you in comfort. Others may invite self-examination. Some may feel like companions for long-familiar burdens. Others may surprise you by speaking into places you had not thought to bring before God. However you read them, my hope is not that these pages would merely inform you, but that they would accompany you.

That is the spirit in which a devotional book should be read.

This is not a race, nor a task to complete as quickly as possible. You may read one devotion in a sitting, or linger over a single paragraph. You may return to one page many times because it meets you in a particular season. You may read with a Bible nearby, with a notebook in hand, or in the quiet simplicity of a morning chair and a cup of coffee. However you come to these pages, come honestly. You do not need to be strong, composed, or spiritually impressive. You only need to be willing.

Willing to pause.
Willing to listen.
Willing to pray.
Willing to let God meet you where you truly are.

If these devotions do anything good, let it be this: that they help you see more clearly that God is still present, still patient, still speaking, still shaping, still comforting, still calling, still redeeming, and still bringing light where darkness seemed too deep. Let them remind you that faithfulness is never wasted, that prayer is never unheard, that hope is never foolish when rooted in Christ, and that even the longest road is walked in the company of a faithful God.

You may be reading this book in a season of peace, or in a season of upheaval. You may be beginning with joy, or with exhaustion. You may be holding a heart full of gratitude, or one still bruised by loss. Wherever this book finds you, my prayer is that it will help steady your heart and gently turn your face again toward the light of Christ.

For He is the One who remains when strength does not.
He is the One who speaks in silence and in storm.
He is the One who meets us in the wilderness and walks beside us on the long road.
He is the One who does not break bruised reeds or despise faint hope.
He is the One who brings light in due time.

So take these pages as they are meant to be taken: not as answers to every question, but as companions for the journey. Read them slowly. Pray through them honestly. Carry what is helpful. Return to what strengthens. And above all, keep walking.

The God who has held you this far will not fail you now.

Section I

Hope in the Dark

There are seasons when faith does not feel triumphant. It feels quiet, strained, and carried more by grace than by strength. This section is for such times. These devotions speak to nights of uncertainty, sorrow, waiting, and weariness, reminding us that God does some of His deepest work in places where we see the least. Even in the dark, He has not abandoned His people. Beneath grief, beneath silence, beneath the frost, His promise is still alive.

Devotion 1

From the Pit to the Promise: Finding God in the Dark

Scripture

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.'"— Genesis 45:4–7, NRSVCE

Reflection

It is perhaps the oldest and most agonizing question in human experience. It hangs in the sterile air of a hospital waiting room, echoes through the silence of an empty house, and rises from the shock of terrible headlines: **Why?** Why did this happen? Why did God allow it? If God is good and powerful, why is there so much pain?

When we suffer—through grief, betrayal, illness, injustice, or loss—we feel a deep need to solve the riddle of our pain. We long for an answer that can satisfy the mind and steady the heart. Yet most explanations, even those offered kindly, often feel thin when suffering is close enough to touch. On this side of heaven, the problem of evil does not come to us with a tidy solution. Scripture itself teaches us humility here; we see through a glass darkly. There are mysteries we cannot untangle. Still, while God does not always give us an answer to the question of why, He does give us a place to stand when the winds of adversity blow. The story of Joseph offers such a place—not by dismissing pain, but by revealing a God who remains at work within it.

Joseph's life is one of the most dramatic narratives in all of Scripture, but we must not rush too quickly to the happy ending. Before Joseph stood in power in Egypt, he endured years of agonizing darkness. At seventeen, he was stripped not only of his coat, but of his dignity. Betrayed by his own brothers, he was sold into slavery and carried far from home. In Egypt, though he acted with integrity, he was falsely accused and thrown into prison, forgotten by those he had helped. Joseph spent the prime of his youth in a pit, and there was nothing small about his suffering.

When he finally stood before his brothers in Genesis 45, Joseph did not pretend the past had not happened. He named it plainly: "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt." He did not call evil good. He did not deny betrayal. He did not excuse sin. What was done to him was real, and it was wrong. God did not make Joseph's brothers envy him or hate him. Their actions belonged to them. Yet Joseph had come to see that human evil, though real, was not ultimate. There was a greater reality at work—Divine Providence.

So Joseph could say, "God sent me before you to preserve life."

That confession gives us an anchor when our own hearts are drifting. Joseph recognized that while others intended harm, God had been at work in and through the wreckage, bending what was meant for evil toward a redemptive purpose. God did not author the sin, but neither did He

surrender Joseph to meaninglessness. Through betrayal, slavery, imprisonment, and long years of waiting, God positioned Joseph to save lives during famine and to preserve the family through whom His covenant promises would continue.

That truth does not answer every painful question, but it helps us ask a better one. When "Why did this happen?" meets the silence of mystery, faith can begin to ask, "What can God do with this?" What kind of grace can He bring from this wound? What life might He preserve? What work of mercy might He yet accomplish through what was meant for harm? This is not shallow optimism. It is resurrection faith. It is the conviction that God is able to take the torn and ragged threads of suffering and weave them into something that bears His grace.

A helpful way to picture this is to imagine a mosaic artist at work. Walk into the studio and you may first see only brokenness—shards of glass, jagged edges of tile, fragments of something that once seemed whole. To the untrained eye, it looks like a ruin. The pieces are sharp. Some can cut. Their brokenness is real. If you were to ask one of those fragments why it was shattered, the answer might be painfully simple: because it fell, because someone was careless, because something precious was broken. But the artist sees beyond the wreckage. With patience and vision, those jagged pieces are gathered and set into place. Slowly, a design emerges. Even the darker fragments, even the sharpest ones, provide contrast and depth that unbroken glass never could. And when the work is finished, the light catches the mosaic and reveals a beauty that was impossible to imagine at the beginning.

So it is with many of the hardest experiences of life. Abuse, illness, divorce, grief, abandonment, loss—these are not good things. We are not asked to pretend that they are. They are jagged pieces, and they wound us deeply. Yet we belong to a God who is the Master Artist. He does not discard the broken pieces of our lives. He gathers them. With wisdom greater than ours and patience deeper than we can measure, He begins to form a picture of redemption that we often cannot yet see.

We see this most clearly in Jesus Christ. The cross was the ultimate act of evil: the sinless Son of God rejected, tortured, and executed by the hands of sinful men. Yet God used that very act to bring about salvation for the world. Joseph's suffering preserved a remnant—the family of Israel. That family line would one day lead to Jesus, the Savior of the world. What was one of the worst things to happen to Joseph became part of the unfolding mercy of God for humanity. And at Calvary, what looked like absolute defeat became the doorway to resurrection.

So if you are walking through a valley of shadows today, hold onto faith without denying reality. Lament honestly before God. He is not threatened by your tears, your confusion, or your questions. Refuse the reflex to blame yourself for every sorrow, unless there is true sin that needs repentance. Much suffering comes simply because this world is not yet healed. Watch for the remnant—for small signs of grace that God is preserving even now: a kind word, a quiet moment, a friend who stays, a lesson learned, a strength you did not know you had. Stay connected to the body of Christ, because suffering isolates and grace often comes through the hands and voices of others. And when you cannot trace God's hand, anchor yourself in His heart. Look to Jesus, who suffered with you and for you, and whose resurrection declares that suffering is never the final word for those who belong to Him.

We may never fully understand the why of our pain in this life. Some mysteries remain too high for us. But we can know the Who. We know the God who was with Joseph in the pit and in the prison. We know the God who entered human suffering in Christ and hung on a cross for us. We know the God who brings life out of death, hope out of ruin, and beauty out of brokenness.

Your story is not over. This chapter may be heavy, perhaps the heaviest you have ever known, but the Author is good. Even now He is at work to preserve, to redeem, and to shape a future hope from what was meant for harm. He is building a remnant. He is making a mosaic. And He is for you.

Prayer

Lord God, I confess that I do not understand why things happen the way they do. My heart is heavy, and the pieces of my life feel scattered and broken. I admit that I am sometimes angry and often afraid. Please help me. I do not ask for all the answers today, but I ask for Your presence. Like Joseph, help me to see Your hand at work even in the darkness. Take the broken pieces of my story and weave them into Your good plan. Keep me from bitterness, and help me to trust that You are redeeming what I cannot repair. Lord, hold on to me when I suffer evil, and keep my trust steadfast in Jesus my Savior. *Amen*.

Devotion 2

Beneath the Frost: Trusting the Holy Timing of Returning Light

Scripture

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."— Ecclesiastes 3:1, NRSVCE

Reflection

The ancient wisdom of Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us that we do not control the rhythm of our own lives. We are invited instead to trust the Author of time itself. There is a season for everything, and that truth becomes an anchor for the soul when life feels delayed, uncertain, or painfully still. It reminds us that no season lasts forever and that God, in His wisdom and love, is at work in every chapter we are called to walk through.

February 28 stands at a meaningful threshold. It is the final day of a long winter month, a hinge-point between what has been and what is beginning to emerge. In the Northern Hemisphere, the ground may still be frozen, the trees still bare, and the air still sharp with cold, yet something is changing all the same. The light is returning. The days are lengthening, minute by quiet minute, almost too gently to notice unless we are paying attention. This moment in the calendar speaks a profound spiritual truth: unseen growth is often taking place beneath the frost, and sometimes the holiest work we can do is to wait with patience and trust.

Winter's stillness is not easy to endure. For many of us, this season of life has held fatigue, grief, loneliness, discouragement, or the long strain of quiet endurance. We know what it is to want movement, breakthrough, and visible signs that something is changing. We live in a world that prizes immediate results and constant blooming. We are taught to believe that if something is worth wanting, it should be pursued quickly and achieved without delay. But the natural world tells a different story, and Scripture confirms it. Spring cannot be forced. It arrives in its appointed time—slowly, faithfully, and under the hand of God.

Consider a seasoned gardener standing at the edge of the garden in late February. The seed catalogs have arrived. The afternoon sun feels warmer than it did only a few weeks earlier. The instinct to begin planting is strong. Yet a wise gardener knows better than to mistake eagerness for readiness. If seeds are pushed into ground that is still too cold and waterlogged from winter storms, they will not flourish. They will simply rot beneath the surface. So the gardener waits for the thaw. The waiting is not laziness. It is not passivity. It is not giving up on the harvest. It is a disciplined act of hope. The gardener understands that timing matters. Forced timing can ruin what patience would have preserved. But when the earth is ready, when the temperature is right, when the season has truly turned, life begins to rise.

The same is true in the life of the soul. There are times when we are tempted to force what God is still preparing. We want answers before wisdom has ripened. We want healing before we have fully grieved. We want open doors before our character has been strengthened enough to walk through them well. We want new beginnings while the ground of our heart is still frozen from what the last season has cost us. Yet God is not absent in that frozen ground. He is not distant in

dormancy. He is just as present in the hidden season as He is in the visible one. In fact, some of His most tender and necessary work is done where no one sees it.

If you feel stuck in a prolonged winter, do not assume that nothing is happening. Beneath the surface, roots are deepening. Beneath the silence, grace is strengthening what will later bear fruit. Beneath the frost, God is preparing the soul to hold what is coming next. Waiting is not wasted time in the kingdom of God. It is often sacred preparation.

That does not mean waiting is easy. Patience is rarely romantic when you are living inside it. It can feel like loss, like unanswered prayer, like doors remaining shut, like carrying hopes that have not yet found their season. But Christian hope does not deny the cold. It does not pretend winter is pleasant when it is hard. It simply refuses to believe that winter is all there is. Hope learns to watch for the returning light. It learns to measure grace in minutes if necessary. It notices that evening comes just a little later now than it did a month ago. It remembers that even when trees stand bare, life is not dead. It is waiting.

So as you stand at whatever threshold is before you, it may help to ask a few gentle questions. What season am I in right now? Am I in a season of rest, pruning, grieving, or beginning again? What might God be growing beneath the surface of my life that I cannot yet see? How has this season deepened my roots, increased my compassion, or taught me greater dependence on grace? And where am I trying to force what is not yet ready? There may be a relationship, a dream, a ministry, a decision, or a personal goal that you keep trying to plant in frozen ground. Faith sometimes means stepping forward boldly, but it also sometimes means letting go of urgency and trusting God's timing more than your own.

A small act of patient hope can become a spiritual practice. Step outside near sunset, or stand by a window and look at the evening sky. Notice how the light lingers a little longer than it once did. Let that simple, quiet change remind you that your life also moves by seasons, and that God is faithful in every one of them. The light may return gradually, but it does return.

The heavy, quiet days of winter do not last forever, even when the chill remains for a time. We can hold on to hope without denying how hard the cold has been. The season of waiting is passing. New life is making its way toward you, even if it is not yet fully visible. The same God who warms the earth, softens the soil, and calls spring from winter is tending your soul with that same patient care. May you find peace in the stillness, courage in the waiting, and a deep, steady trust that beneath the frost, God is already at work.

Prayer

Gracious and eternal God, we thank You for being wonderfully present in every season of our lives—in the bitter cold of our winters and in the joyful warmth of our springs. As we stand in this in-between space, we ask for the patience to trust Your perfect timing. When we are tired of waiting and tempted to force our own way, quiet our restless hearts. Give us the eyes to notice the returning light, the faith to believe in the growth happening beneath the frost, and the enduring hope that new life is always on the way. Keep us rooted in Your love as we wait for the thaw. *Amen.*

Devotion 3

Beauty from Ashes: Trusting God in the Fire

Scripture

"To provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory." — Isaiah 61:3, NRSVCE

Reflection

Isaiah 61:3 gives one of Scripture's most tender promises: that God is able to bring beauty from devastation, joy from sorrow, and praise from despair. Originally spoken to the people of Israel after seasons of ruin and exile, these words continue to speak comfort to all who have walked through suffering. They remind us that God does not merely observe our ashes from a distance. He enters places of loss and brokenness with the power to restore, renew, and bring purpose where despair once seemed final.

History offers sobering reminders of just how deep human suffering can run. On the night of March 10, 1945, Tokyo was devastated by one of the deadliest bombings in history. Fire swept across the city with terrifying force. More than 100,000 people, most of them civilians, lost their lives, and vast sections of the city were left in ruins. Families were shattered. Homes and neighborhoods disappeared in the flames. The suffering of that night is difficult to comprehend, and its scars were not easily erased. It was a scene of unimaginable loss, the kind of devastation that leaves behind not only physical ashes, but also the grief, disorientation, and unanswered questions that cling to survivors long after the smoke has cleared.

Yet one of the remarkable truths of history is that Tokyo did not remain only a place of ruin. Over time, it was rebuilt. Life returned. Streets filled again. What had been devastated was not forgotten, but neither was it abandoned to desolation forever. Today, Tokyo stands as one of the world's great cities, a testimony to resilience, rebuilding, and renewal after extraordinary destruction. That does not lessen the horror of what happened, nor does it romanticize suffering. Rather, it points to a truth we also find in Scripture: ashes are not always the end of the story.

This is not merely a lesson for cities or nations. It is also true in the spiritual life. Many of us know what it means to sit in the ashes of some personal loss. It may not come by war or disaster, but the devastation can still feel absolute. A broken relationship, a grave diagnosis, the death of someone deeply loved, the collapse of a dream, the shame of failure, or the long ache of disappointment can all leave a person feeling as though fire has swept through the landscape of the heart. In such seasons, it can seem as though nothing beautiful could ever grow there again.

But Isaiah says otherwise. God promises to give "a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." This is not a denial of sorrow. It is not a command to pretend that grief is easy or that devastation does not wound deeply. Ashes are real. Mourning is real. A faint spirit is real. God's promise is powerful precisely because it meets us in the truth of our pain. He does not ask us to hide our wounds before He

begins His healing work. He comes to us in the middle of the ruin and says that restoration is still possible.

The life of Corrie ten Boom offers a moving example of this kind of faith. Corrie and her family, Dutch Christians during the Nazi occupation, risked their lives to help Jewish people escape persecution. For that courage, they were arrested and sent to a concentration camp. There she endured unspeakable suffering and witnessed horrors that few of us can imagine. Yet after her release, Corrie did not speak as someone untouched by pain. She spoke as someone who had discovered that God's presence reaches even into the darkest human places. Her well-known words still echo with quiet power: there is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still. That conviction did not erase her suffering, but it did bear witness to a love stronger than it. In the ashes of war, grief, and cruelty, she found that God was still present and still able to redeem.

That same hope is offered to us. We all face moments when life feels burned over, when what once seemed secure has been reduced to rubble. In those moments, faith does not always arrive as dramatic triumph. Sometimes it is simply the stubborn decision to believe that God is still at work when we cannot yet see what He is building. It is trusting that loss is not the final word. It is refusing to believe that despair owns the future. It is holding onto the promise that God is in the business of rebuilding lives as surely as cities can be rebuilt after fire.

If you are struggling with loss today, know that God has not abandoned you in the ruins. He is able to work even in places that seem beyond repair. If despair has settled heavily over your heart, do not let go of His promise too soon. Joy may feel far away, but the Lord who turns mourning into gladness has not forgotten your name. And if you are witnessing the brokenness of the world around you, you can still become a bearer of hope. A kind word, a faithful prayer, a gentle presence, a helping hand—these become ways of reflecting the restoring heart of God in a world that often feels scorched by sorrow.

History is filled with nights of terrible darkness, but it is also filled with signs that darkness does not have the final word. Tokyo rose from the ashes. Corrie ten Boom emerged from horror with a testimony of God's faithfulness. And countless believers through the centuries have discovered that God is still restoring lives, still healing hearts, and still bringing beauty where only ruin seemed possible.

The firebombing of Tokyo remains a tragedy beyond words, and no reflection should minimize the depth of that suffering. Yet even amid the ruins, life continued. That is one of the quiet mercies of God's world: He continues to bring forth life where death has done its worst. Isaiah 61:3 is not just a promise for nations long ago. It is a promise for wounded hearts today. No matter what lies in ashes before you, God is able to bring restoration. He is able to replace mourning with joy, despair with praise, and devastation with new beauty shaped by His grace. The ashes may be real, but so is His power to redeem.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in a world that often feels broken and consumed by fire, remind us that You are the God of restoration. When we walk through seasons of loss, give us faith to believe in Your promise of renewal. Help us to trust in Your plan even when we cannot see the outcome. May we

be bearers of hope to those in despair, and may our lives be a testimony to Your power to bring beauty from ashes. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 4

Beyond the Shadow: Finding Peace in the Light

Scripture

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." — Luke 2:29–32, NRSVCE

Reflection

February 2 brings together a remarkable convergence of meanings. In the church calendar, it is the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, traditionally called Candlemas—the day Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple forty days after His birth. It is a feast of encounter, where long expectation meets holy fulfillment. The hopes of Israel, carried for generations and embodied in the elderly Simeon and Anna, meet the new reality of God's presence in the fragile form of a child. At the same time, our secular calendar marks this date as Groundhog Day, a day wrapped in folklore about shadows and the lingering length of winter. History also records that on February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, ending the Mexican-American War. Though these observances seem unrelated, each one, in its own way, asks how we will face the future: will we live by the shadow of fear, or by the light of peace?

There is a striking contrast between the folklore of the groundhog and the faith of Simeon. According to tradition, the groundhog emerges, surveys the day, and if he sees his shadow, he retreats in fear, as though darkness has spoken the final word and winter will linger still longer. It is a quaint custom, yet it mirrors something very human in us. We often emerge into our own days in much the same way. We scan the headlines, our schedules, our finances, our health, our relationships. We notice possible trouble, uncertain outcomes, difficult conversations, or signs of loss, and we instinctively pull back. The shadow dictates our mood. Fear begins to shape our imagination. We brace ourselves for another long emotional winter.

Simeon offers us another way to see. He too had lived through a kind of winter, but his was not a season of weather. It was a season of waiting. Scripture tells us he was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel. He had spent years longing for the fulfillment of God's promise, waiting through silence, delay, and the unfinished ache of his people's hope. Yet when Mary and Joseph entered the Temple with the infant Jesus, Simeon did not look for shadows. He looked at the Light. In this tiny child, he saw more than a baby in His mother's arms. He saw the faithfulness of God, the fulfillment of promise, and the arrival of peace so deep that he was ready to face even death without fear. "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace," he prayed. This was not weary resignation. It was the language of settled trust. Simeon had found the end of his striving because he had received the One for whom he had waited.

That peace reaches further than any earthly settlement. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on this same date in history, ended a war and redrew borders on a map. It was a political act meant to establish peace between nations. Yet the peace Simeon experienced was of another kind entirely. It redrew the borders of the human heart. Holding Christ, Simeon realized that the deeper war—the long estrangement between humanity and God, the ache of unfulfilled longing,

the burden of waiting without resolution—was being answered in this child. The Light had come, and because the Light had come, the shadows no longer possessed the same power. Simeon could look toward the future, even toward death itself, without retreating in fear, because he was holding the One who had entered history to overcome darkness.

This speaks directly into the way many of us live. It is easy to let our shadows determine our emotional climate. A troubling diagnosis, a discouraging email, a tense conversation, a sleepless night, or a burden we cannot seem to shake can make us feel as though winter is stretching endlessly ahead. The temptation is to retreat, to pull inward, to live cautiously and fearfully, as though the shadow is telling the truth about our future. But Candlemas reminds us that the shadow is not the truest thing in the room. Christ is. The Light of the World has entered the temple of human history, and His presence changes the meaning of our fears. The existence of shadows does not mean the absence of God. In fact, shadows only exist where light is already present.

To live with what might be called Candlemas vision is to practice turning our attention from the shadow to the Light. This does not mean pretending our fears are not real. Simeon was not naive; he lived in a troubled world, under Roman occupation, amid the weary hopes of a waiting people. Yet he saw clearly enough to recognize that God's promise had arrived, and that recognition gave him peace. We are invited into that same kind of seeing. When fear rises, when uncertainty looms, when today casts a long shadow over tomorrow, we can choose not to let the shadow define the day. We can consciously acknowledge the presence of Christ. We can remember that, like Simeon, we are not left alone with our fears. We have access to the peace of God because we have access to the presence of God.

A simple act can help make this truth tangible. Light a candle in your home this evening. Watch its flame in the quiet. Name before God one particular shadow you are facing right now—a fear, a burden, a lingering uncertainty. Then, as the candle burns, whisper Simeon's prayer: "Lord, let your servant go in peace." Let those words become an act of surrender. Place that fear into the hands of the One who has already entered the darkness and overcome it. Let the small flame remind you that light does not need to be loud to be victorious. It only needs to be present.

February 2 is a day of converging histories and symbols, but the most important story unfolding on this date is the one in your own heart. You do not have to live superstitiously, fearing that the shadows of today are final predictions about tomorrow. You do not have to retreat every time uncertainty appears on the horizon. The Light of the World has been presented in the temple of our history, and because He is here, the long winter of separation from God is over. His presence has begun the springtime of grace. The shadows may still fall across our days, but they no longer rule them. In Christ, peace is possible, waiting is redeemed, and the future can be faced without fear.

Prayer

Gracious God of Light and Peace, on this day where we remember the presentation of your Son, we ask for the vision of Simeon and the praise of Anna. Too often, we are like the creature that fears its own shadow, retreating when life feels cold or uncertain. Help us to stop looking at the darkness and start looking at the Light. Thank You that we can depart from our anxieties in

peace, knowing that our eyes have seen Your salvation. Illumine our hearts today, that we might be reflections of Your light to a world still waiting for dawn. *Amen*.

Devotion 5

When We Remember the Brokenness of the Human Heart

Scripture

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." — Romans 12:21, NRSVCE

Reflection

Some dates on the calendar call us to celebrate, while others call us to remember with bowed heads and humbled hearts. March 16 is one of those solemn days. On that date in 1968, the My Lai massacre became one of the most painful reminders of how deeply human beings can fail one another when fear, violence, and moral blindness are allowed to take hold. Remembering such a tragedy is never easy, nor should it be. It asks something difficult of us. It asks us to look honestly at history, and then just as honestly at ourselves. Paul's words in Romans, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," do not soften evil or excuse its consequences. They call us to face it truthfully while refusing to let it shape what kind of people we become.

One of the sobering lessons of My Lai is that great evil does not always begin with dramatic wickedness. More often, it begins in quieter ways: with fear left unchallenged, resentment allowed to grow, conscience slowly dulled, or people spoken of as though they are less than human. Scripture teaches that every person bears the image of God. That truth is not a decorative idea; it is a safeguard for the soul. When it is forgotten, cruelty becomes easier. Silence becomes more comfortable. Mercy begins to feel optional. Once people stop seeing the image of God in others, the ground has already begun to shift beneath them.

Paul's warning is more searching than it first appears. Evil does not only wound through violent acts themselves. It also works by reshaping the hearts of those who witness it, excuse it, justify it, or simply learn to live beside it without protest. To be overcome by evil is not only to commit evil, but to let evil tutor the heart. It is to let hatred teach us how to hate, fear teach us whom to distrust, bitterness teach us whom to dismiss, or indifference teach us how not to care. In that sense, evil spreads not only through action, but through surrender. It advances wherever conscience grows quiet and wherever human dignity is treated as negotiable.

The gospel offers another way. Christ calls us to overcome evil with good—not with shallow niceness, not with sentimentality, and not with passivity, but with courageous good. This kind of goodness tells the truth even when it is uncomfortable. It refuses to look away from suffering. It practices compassion, repentance, justice, and mercy. It resists the temptation to become hardened by a hard world. Jesus Himself embodied this holy resistance. He never treated people as disposable. He saw the wounded, the outcast, the powerless, and the overlooked, and He restored to them the dignity others had denied. In Him, goodness is not weakness. It is moral courage shaped by the love of God.

We do not have to look only at history to understand how easily harm grows. Consider an ordinary workplace where one employee is mocked repeatedly because of an accent, a disability, their age, or simply because they are different. Most people in the room may not join in directly. Some may even feel unsettled by what they hear. Yet many remain silent. They lower their eyes,

force a small laugh, change the subject, or tell themselves it is not their place to intervene. Over time, silence begins to protect the cruelty. What started as a cutting comment becomes a culture. What seemed minor deepens into something wounding and humiliating. Everyday life teaches us how easily harm grows when people stop seeing one another clearly.

That is one reason remembrance matters. We do not remember tragedies like My Lai simply to remain trapped in grief, nor to point at the sins of others from a safe moral distance. We remember because such events expose truths about the human heart that remain relevant in every age. The seeds of cruelty can appear anywhere human dignity is denied. They grow in contempt, in mockery, in prejudice, in fear, in the easy labeling of whole groups of people, and in the habit of silence when courage is needed. Remembrance becomes a form of resistance. It teaches us to recognize the early signs of hardness before they ripen into something worse.

For the Christian, this remembrance must also become repentance. A day like this invites more than sorrow; it invites examination. We ask God not only to heal the wounds of history, but to search our own hearts. Where have we grown numb to the pain of others? Where have we looked away because involvement would cost us something? Where have we allowed anger, bias, frustration, or group loyalty to dull our compassion? These questions are not meant to crush us, but to awaken us. Grace does not merely forgive us after the fact. Grace reshapes us. It teaches us to become people who tell the truth, who defend the vulnerable, and who choose mercy over indifference.

This means that remembrance must take flesh in daily life. We honor the dignity of others not only in our thoughts, but in our habits. We refuse dismissive speech, demeaning humor, and casual cruelty. We practice seeing each person we meet as someone made in the image of God. When we encounter mistreatment, we choose gentleness joined to courage instead of silence joined to fear. We pray for places in the world still torn by violence, but we also ask the Lord to expose whatever hidden hardness remains within us. Sometimes the holiest act in a given moment is simply to interrupt indifference—whether in a conversation, in an attitude, in a memory, or in our own silence.

The memory of My Lai confronts us with the sobering truth that human beings are capable of terrible wrong when conscience is surrendered and dignity is denied. Yet the gospel does not leave us in despair. Even in the shadow of human violence, God calls us toward repentance, reconciliation, compassion, and peace. We remember not in order to be consumed by darkness, but in order to be changed by truth. In Christ, evil does not have to have the last word. God is still able to form hearts that grieve what is broken, speak for those who are overlooked, resist the spread of cruelty, and overcome evil with good. And that work begins not only in history's great moments, but in the ordinary decisions of our own daily lives.

Prayer

Merciful God, on this solemn day we remember all who have suffered through violence, war, cruelty, and the failures of the human heart. We pray for the victims of My Lai and for all people, in every generation, whose dignity has been trampled by hatred, fear, or indifference. Forgive us for the ways we have looked away from suffering, excused what is wrong, or failed to love our neighbors as You have called us to do. Heal the wounds carried by individuals, families, and nations. Search our hearts and remove from us whatever hardens us against

others. Form in us the mind of Christ, that we may become people of mercy, truth, courage, and peace. Teach us to honor the sacred worth of every human life and to overcome evil with good. Amen.

Devotion 6

A Turning Point of Light: Joy in the Midst of the Lenten Journey

Scripture

"Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her." — Isaiah 66:10, NRSVCE

Reflection

Laetare Sunday, the Fourth Sunday in Lent, takes its name from the Latin word for "rejoice." It marks the midpoint of the Lenten journey, when the church briefly sets aside the somber purple of penitence and lifts before us the softer, hopeful color of rose. It is not a denial of Lent, nor a break from repentance, but a gracious pause within it—a reminder that even in a season of solemn reflection, God gives signs of coming joy. This Sunday often arrives near the middle of March, close to dates that carry a heavy historical resonance. The "Ides of March" has long been remembered as a symbol of betrayal, conspiracy, and political collapse in ancient Rome. Around this same season, history also recalls moments when, in the wake of injustice and suffering, moral courage helped bend events toward greater justice and hope. Together, these memories remind us that human history often holds both darkness and light side by side, and that hearts, communities, and even nations can still turn toward grace.

That pattern is not only found in history. It is also woven deeply into the life of faith. Anyone who has ever cared for a sick loved one through the long hours of the night knows the special weight of what might be called the night shift. In those quiet hours, the world narrows to a single room. Time stretches. The sound of a clock ticking or the hum of medical equipment seems louder than it should. Weariness settles into the bones. Tears come more easily. Worry circles in the mind without relief. The darkness magnifies every fear and every unanswered question. And yet, even in that long and exhausting vigil, there is often a moment when the sky begins to change. Somewhere near dawn, the darkness softens. Pale pink light touches the edges of the blinds. The room has not yet changed, and the illness has not instantly vanished, but something real has happened all the same. Morning has begun. The long night has been broken. That first light does not solve everything, but it brings courage, relief, and the quiet renewal needed to keep going.

Lent is much like that. It is, in many ways, a spiritual night shift. We enter this season willingly, but not lightly. It is a time of self-examination, repentance, waiting, and deeper prayer. We walk with Christ toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, toward the truth about sin and our need for mercy. Lent is not meant to flatter us. It strips away illusion. It asks us to look honestly at ourselves, at our wounds, our habits, our compromises, and our need for grace. Yet God does not ask us to endure this darkness without a promise of dawn. Laetare Sunday is that first pink light breaking through the blinds. It reminds us that repentance is not the end of the story. Mourning is not the final word. Resurrection is already on the horizon.

This tension between sorrow and joy is woven into the very fabric of the Christian life. The most meaningful turning points often come only after a difficult passage through sorrow, struggle, or

wilderness. Public movements toward justice are often preceded by suffering, perseverance, and costly witness. The same is true in the life of the soul. Good Friday comes before Easter morning. In Scripture, Isaiah calls the people to "rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her." That is a profoundly Christian pattern—to rejoice not because pain is unreal, but because God is able to bring hope out of sorrow and grace out of broken places. He does not ignore mourning; He transforms it. He does not pretend darkness is light; He shines within it. He is the God who specializes in turning our deepest griefs into testimonies of His faithfulness.

That truth matters in troubled times, because many of us know what it is to live through our own "Ides of March." We know what it means to encounter betrayal, disappointment, failure, or the collapse of something we thought was secure. We know seasons when personal hopes seem stalled, when communities struggle, when the world feels heavy with division, violence, or uncertainty. In those moments, it is easy to imagine that darkness is the truest thing about our lives. But Laetare Sunday tells another story. It teaches us that even while Lent continues, grace is already at work. Even while repentance deepens, hope is quietly rising. Even while the wounds of the world remain real, God has not ceased bringing light into history and into the hidden chambers of the human heart.

So it is worth asking where you are serving the night shift right now. Perhaps you are walking through a long season of hardship. Perhaps you are caring for someone vulnerable, striving for a more just community, waiting for healing in a relationship, or battling a private struggle that has worn you thin. Perhaps your labor is outward and public, or perhaps it is silent and unseen. Wherever it is, Laetare Sunday invites you to look for the rose-colored signs of God's mercy in the middle of it. The dawn does not always arrive with fanfare. Sometimes it comes in a small act of kindness, a word of encouragement, a moment of prayer, a fresh measure of strength, or the quiet assurance that your faithfulness is not wasted. God sees the perseverance of those who keep watch in the night. He sees the tears, the hidden acts of love, the daily choosing of courage over despair.

One holy response to this day is to bring a little light into the very place that feels darkest. Choose one small act of courage or compassion. Speak a word of hope where discouragement has settled. Offer patience where frustration has ruled. Reach out to someone lonely. Continue doing the quiet good that seems small but shines more brightly than you know. In the kingdom of God, these acts matter. They are signs that the dawn is nearer than the darkness would have us believe.

Even in the most solemn seasons of life, God does not leave us without signs of mercy and renewal. The bleakest stretches of history can become testimonies of courage and justice. The hardest seasons of the soul can become places where grace first breaks through. Our own Lenten deserts are already holding the seeds of resurrection. So keep walking. Keep hoping. Let yourself receive the mercy of this day. The sky is beginning to soften. The light is returning. And in Christ, the dawn is never far away.

Prayer

God of justice and joy, we thank You for the light that breaks into our darkness. In a world that often feels weighed down by sorrow and division, grant us the courage to be people of the dawn. Comfort those who are currently walking through the long night of hardship, illness, or injustice, and remind us all that Your grace is constantly at work, turning our mourning into dancing. Strengthen our hearts for the remainder of this Lenten journey, that we may walk forward in repentance, compassion, and unshakeable hope in Jesus Christ. *Amen*.

Devotion 7

The Light We Carry Down

Scripture

"So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." — 2 Peter 1:19, NRSVCE

Reflection

Transfiguration Sunday stands as a magnificent threshold in the Christian year. It comes at the close of Epiphany, a season shaped by the revelation of divine light, and just before the beginning of Lent, a season of penitence, self-examination, and the long journey toward the cross. This day serves as the bridge between the two. In many Christian traditions, it is also the final time "Alleluia" is spoken or sung in worship until Easter morning. There is something tender and almost bittersweet about that moment. The church gives voice to its highest praise one last time and then sets it aside, almost like placing a treasured heirloom in safekeeping, as we prepare to enter the quieter, more searching wilderness of the next forty days. Yet before we descend into that silence, we are invited to the mountain to see clearly who it is we are following.

The story of the Transfiguration in Matthew's Gospel is one of dazzling and unsettling glory. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain, and there the ordinary veil is suddenly lifted. His face shines like the sun. His clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear beside Him, embodying the Law and the Prophets, the whole long witness of Israel gathered around the Christ. Then a bright cloud overshadows them, and from that cloud comes the voice of the Father: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" It is a moment of overwhelming revelation, the kind of moment that both draws a person in and leaves them trembling. No wonder Peter wants to build dwellings and remain there. Faced with such a vision, who would not want to stay?

We understand Peter's impulse because we know something of it ourselves. We all long for the clarity and nearness of the mountaintop. We want to remain where God feels unmistakably present and the noise of ordinary life seems far away. Most people can remember some form of "peak" experience, whether explicitly spiritual or simply deeply awakening. It may have been reaching the summit of a hard hike just as the morning sun broke over the horizon. For a little while, everything felt clear. The air was crisp, the sky endless, and the usual worries—bills, health, deadlines, strained relationships—seemed strangely small beneath the vastness of the moment. Perhaps you felt both humbled and enlarged at once, tiny before creation and yet deeply connected to something larger than yourself. In such moments, there is a quiet temptation to believe that this is where real life happens and that everything below is merely interruption.

But the mountain is not where we are meant to remain. Eventually, the wind changes. The sun rises higher. The trail must be taken in reverse. One has to descend back to the parking lot, return to traffic, step into rooms that need cleaning, answer emails, tend to responsibilities, and carry burdens that did not disappear just because the view was beautiful. That does not make the mountaintop false. It makes it a gift. The purpose of the mountain is not escape; it is

revelation. It is not a hiding place from the world, but a place where we are strengthened to return to it with deeper vision.

That is precisely what happens in the Transfiguration. The disciples are not given this glimpse of Christ's glory so they can build a permanent shelter there and avoid the road ahead. They are given this vision because the road ahead will be hard. They will need the memory of radiant glory to endure the coming darkness of Gethsemane and Golgotha. They will need to remember the Father's voice in the cloud when they later face the silence of the tomb. The Transfiguration is not a detour around suffering. It is preparation for faithfulness within it. The disciples see Jesus shining like the sun so that when His face is later bruised and bloodied, they will know that suffering does not erase His identity. They hear the command to listen to Him so that when His words become difficult, demanding, or costly, they will still trust Him.

There is a deep wisdom here for our own lives. We go up the mountain to behold God, but we go down into the valley to serve Him. The descent is not failure. It is mission. It is easy to think that the most sacred moments are the ones of spiritual intensity—retreats, worship services where the heart feels strangely warmed, moments of prayer when God seems almost tangible, or seasons when Scripture glows with unusual clarity. Those are indeed precious gifts. But they are not the whole of discipleship. The real test of the mountaintop is what it makes possible in the valley. If we have seen even a glimpse of Christ's glory, then we are meant to carry that memory into places of sorrow, conflict, weariness, and ordinary labor.

One way to do that is to hold onto moments of God's faithfulness like a lamp for darker seasons. Peter himself later writes of the prophetic message as a lamp shining in a dark place. It can be a holy practice to remember specific times when God's presence felt unmistakably near. Write one of those moments down. Keep it where you can find it when the road grows weary. When Lent feels heavy, or life feels clouded, return to that witness. Not because memory replaces faith, but because memory steadies it. The sun is still shining even when clouds have gathered.

Another way to carry the light of the mountain is by practicing the ministry of presence in the valley. Down below, people are hurting. They do not always need explanations. Often they do not need a speech at all. Peter's instinct on the mountain was to talk and build, but the Father redirected him with a simpler command: listen. Sometimes the most transfigured thing we can do is simply be with someone in their pain, attentive and unhurried, reflecting the quiet faithfulness of Christ. We serve the God who came down the mountain and walked toward suffering, not away from it.

And as the church sets aside the Alleluia for a season, we are also invited to embrace a little more silence. In a noisy world, silence can feel uncomfortable, yet it can become a sacred space of listening. Turn down the background noise when you can. Let there be moments in the car, the home, or the day when there is no soundtrack but your own breathing and the nearness of God. The silence of Lent is not empty if it teaches us to listen more deeply to the Beloved Son.

We cannot remain on the mountain, but we are forever changed by having been there. As we step toward Lent, we leave behind the dazzling brightness of that vision, yet we do not walk in darkness. We carry the memory of glory in our hearts. The Alleluia may fall silent on our lips, but the hope it signifies remains alive within us. The mountain has shown us who Christ is. Now

the valley becomes the place where we follow Him—with steadier trust, deeper listening, and a light we did not create but are now called to bear.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for the moments where the veil is thin and Your glory is undeniable. When we are on the mountaintop, fill us with awe. When we must descend into the valley, fill us with courage. Help us to listen to Your Son, the Beloved, especially when the path becomes steep and the shadows lengthen. May the light we have seen in Him become the light we share with a world in need. *Amen*.

Devotion 8

Love That Costs: The Courage of St. Valentine

Scripture

"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." — 1 John 3:18, NRSVCE

Reflection

In the middle of February, we often find ourselves in the long, gray stretch of winter. The brightness of the New Year has faded, and spring has not yet arrived. It is a season that asks something of us. It asks patience, steadiness, and endurance. Perhaps that is one reason it feels so fitting that this point in the calendar has become associated with love. Our culture surrounds this day with roses, chocolates, greeting cards, and sentimental expressions, yet the deeper roots of February 14 reach far beyond warm feelings and romantic gestures. At its heart, this day brings together two realities that do not always seem to belong together at first glance: human affection and holy martyrdom. It reminds us that love is not merely a mood we fall into when life feels bright. True love is a deliberate, grace-shaped practice, one that can keep a soul warm even when the world around it feels cold.

Long before this day became linked with cards and candy, it was set apart to remember the martyrdom of a priest named Valentine. Tradition places him in Rome during the reign of Emperor Claudius II, around the third century. According to longstanding accounts, Claudius forbade marriages for young soldiers, believing that single men made better warriors because they were less tied to home and family. Valentine, however, answered to a higher authority. Convinced that marriage was a sacred covenant and not merely a civil arrangement, he continued to perform marriages for Christian couples in secret. His obedience to God and his commitment to love in its truest form eventually led to imprisonment and death. In the end, Valentine gave his life not for sentiment, but for faithfulness.

That witness still speaks. It tells us that love is not only tenderness. It is courage. It is not only desire. It is conviction. It is not only what we feel in moments of happiness, but what we choose in moments of cost. It is one thing to love when life is easy, when the sun is shining, and when affection comes naturally. It is another thing entirely to love when love is tested—when it is inconvenient, sacrificial, hidden, exhausting, or even dangerous. Valentine's life reveals that Christian love is never shallow. It is rooted in a willingness to honor covenant, truth, and the good of another person, even when doing so requires suffering.

We do not have to look only to ancient history to see this kind of love. It appears, often quietly, in ordinary lives all around us. Think of the husband who sits day after day beside the bed of a wife who no longer recognizes him, feeding her patiently, speaking gently to her, tending to her with the same care he once offered in healthier days. There is nothing flashy about such love. There is no applause, no cinematic swell of music, no easy romance. Yet in that quiet room, something profoundly holy is taking place. A covenant is being honored in the face of loss. Faithfulness is standing its ground against illness, memory loss, and time itself. That kind of love is not driven by changing emotion. It is sustained by promise. It is love "in truth and

action," the kind Scripture commends. It shows us that Christian love is not opposed to romance; it deepens and steadies it by anchoring affection in fidelity, sacrifice, and grace.

That is why this day invites us to look deeper than sentiment. Sentiment has its place. There is nothing wrong with flowers, kind words, or warm gestures. But if love remains only at the level of feeling, it will struggle to endure the long winters of life. Marriage, friendship, family, and even community life all eventually pass through seasons when affection must be carried by something sturdier than emotion. There are days when love means listening one more time, forgiving again, staying present in another person's pain, or serving quietly without recognition. There are moments when love does not feel glamorous at all. It looks like patience when tiredness makes irritability tempting. It looks like kindness when stress would rather speak sharply. It looks like showing up when absence would be easier. In such moments, love becomes less like a greeting card and more like a fire carefully tended in winter—a living warmth that must be fed with intention.

This is where the witness of St. Valentine becomes especially practical. Love is not strengthened only by grand declarations, but by specific acts of grace. One simple way to practice that kind of love is to move beyond generic expressions of affection and name what is truly admirable in another person. Tell a spouse, a friend, a child, or a family member not only that you love them, but how you see Christ's grace at work in them. Perhaps it is their patience, their diligence, their gentleness, or the quiet way they carry burdens for others. Such words do more than flatter; they honor the image of God in the other person. They make love more concrete and more truthful.

Love also takes shape in hidden service. Sometimes the most meaningful gift is not spoken at all. It is the unnoticed task completed without complaint, the burden quietly lifted from someone else's shoulders, the willingness to serve without needing credit. In a home or workplace, such acts often preach more powerfully than many words. They say, in effect, "Your peace matters to me. Your weariness matters to me. I am willing to spend myself, even in small ways, for your good." That is a deeply Christian form of love.

And because so much relational damage happens in moments of fatigue and friction, love also requires inward discipline. It can be a holy practice to pause before responding when irritation rises. Even a few seconds of silence can become an offering to God. In that pause, a person can pray, "Lord, help me answer with gentleness." That small surrender may not seem dramatic, but it is often in such moments that love proves its strength. The heart is being trained to respond not out of impulse, but out of grace.

As winter lingers on, the witness of St. Valentine reminds us that love is sturdier than we sometimes imagine. It can withstand the decrees of emperors, the chill of difficult seasons, the strain of illness, the weight of disappointment, and the long work of daily faithfulness. When our love is rooted in the sacrificial love of Christ, we find strength to offer more than sentiment. We offer ourselves—our patience, our service, our courage, our gentleness, and our fidelity. That is the kind of love that warms a room, steadies a home, and honors God. May your love be such a living force: not merely spoken, but practiced; not merely felt, but chosen; not merely admired, but embodied in truth and action.

Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, we thank You for the gift of love, revealed most perfectly in the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus Christ. On this day, we look beyond the surface of sentiment to the depth of covenant faithfulness. Give us the courage to love not just in word, but in truth and action. We pray specifically for marriages that need strengthening, for those who are single and seeking community, for widows and widowers feeling the ache of loss, and for relationships strained by conflict. Bind us together with cords of kindness that cannot be broken. Teach us to love one another as You have loved us—selflessly, sacrificially, and without end. *Amen*.

Devotion 9

The Life Jacket of Love

Scripture

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." — John 15:13, NRSVCE

Reflection

On February 3, 1943, the USAT *Dorchester* was struck by a torpedo in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. In the terror that followed, as panic spread and the ship began to sink, four chaplains of different faith traditions—George Fox, Alexander Goode, John Washington, and Clark Poling—moved through the chaos not with self-preservation, but with sacrificial calm. They comforted frightened soldiers, helped men toward safety, and when the supply of life jackets was exhausted, they removed their own and gave them away. In the end, these four men linked arms, prayed, and went down with the ship together. Their final moments have echoed through history because they revealed something luminous in the midst of horror: love that chooses another's life over one's own safety.

The heroism of the Four Chaplains is extraordinary, and for most of us it feels almost beyond imagination. Few people are ever asked to surrender so much in a single moment. Yet the principle that shaped their final act is not limited to shipwrecks, battlefields, or history books. It appears again and again in quieter, smaller places—places so ordinary that we may overlook their holiness. It appears in the parent who gives the last slice of pizza to a hungry teenager and casually says, "I'm not really hungry anyway." It appears in the coworker who stays late to help a colleague finish a project so that person can make it home in time for a child's recital. It appears in the spouse who takes the harder chore without complaint, the friend who gives up an evening to sit with someone grieving, the church member who quietly steps in where help is needed and never asks to be thanked.

Most of us will never be asked to surrender a physical life jacket on a sinking ship. But we are all asked, almost daily, to loosen our grip on what might be called our comfort jackets. These are the things that make us feel safe, protected, important, or in control. Sometimes it is our time. Sometimes it is our preference. Sometimes it is our schedule, our resources, our privacy, our patience, or our need to be right. These are not bad things in themselves. In fact, some of them are necessary parts of a healthy life. But love often asks whether we are willing to release them when another person's need rises before us. It asks whether our comfort matters more than someone else's peace, whether our convenience matters more than someone else's burden, whether our pride matters more than someone else's dignity.

That is what makes the witness of the Four Chaplains so enduring. They did not pause to sort people by category. They did not ask who deserved saving more. They did not check religious affiliation, background, or rank before offering what they had. They saw human need, and they answered it with everything within them. Their courage was not merely emotional. It was moral and spiritual. It came from hearts trained to see others as worthy of care, even at great cost to themselves. In that sense, their final act was not only a moment of wartime heroism. It was an embodiment of the gospel principle that love lays itself down.

Scripture consistently points us toward this kind of love. Christian love is not merely affection or approval. It is not measured only by warm feelings or kind intentions. It is made visible in self-giving action. Jesus did not simply teach love; He enacted it. He gave of His time, His strength, His attention, His compassion, and in the end His very life. When He washed His disciples' feet, He showed that love stoops low. When He welcomed the overlooked and the wounded, He showed that love notices need. When He went to the cross, He showed that love is willing to bear the cost of another's rescue. Every act of sacrificial service we offer, no matter how small, is a faint but real echo of that greater love.

This means that discipleship is often lived out not in dramatic heroics, but in daily surrender. The Christian life is full of small moments in which we choose whether to cling or to give. We choose whether to protect our comfort or to make room for another person's need. We choose whether to insist on our preference or to lay it down in patience. We choose whether to hold tightly to our time or to spend it for someone who is weary, lonely, or overwhelmed. These choices may not make headlines. No one may ever tell their story beyond the walls of a home, a workplace, or a church hallway. Yet heaven sees them clearly. In the kingdom of God, these ordinary sacrifices are not small. They are how love takes on flesh.

It is worth asking, then, what life jacket you may be holding tightly today. Perhaps it is your free time, which you guard because you feel worn thin. Perhaps it is your need for recognition, your insistence on being understood, your desire to have the last word, or the emotional distance that helps you feel protected. Perhaps it is your patience, which has grown thin under stress, or a resource you are reluctant to share because you fear not having enough left for yourself. The question is not whether you are allowed to have needs; of course you are. The question is whether love is asking you, in some particular way, to let go of something for the good of another person.

That surrender may be very practical. It may mean giving someone your attention when you would rather withdraw. It may mean choosing gentleness over sharpness, especially when you feel justified in your irritation. It may mean taking on an inconvenience so that someone else can breathe a little easier. It may mean offering encouragement, forgiveness, or help without waiting to be asked twice. Often the life jacket we give away is not dramatic at all. It is simply the thing that would have made our own day smoother, easier, or more comfortable. But in giving it, we become a source of safety, peace, or strength for someone else.

The legacy of the Four Chaplains teaches us that unity and love are stronger than fear. In the face of terror, they chose compassion. In the face of scarcity, they chose generosity. In the face of death, they chose to preserve life. Their witness reminds us that the highest form of love is not merely spoken, admired, or remembered—it is embodied. And whenever we let go of what protects or comforts us in order to help another person, we participate in that same holy pattern. Love becomes more than a feeling. It becomes an offering. It becomes a life jacket placed in another's hands.

Prayer

God of all comfort and courage, we thank you for the inspiring example of the Four Chaplains, who showed us that love transcends boundaries and fear. Grant us the strength to be selfless in our daily lives, to see the needs of those around us, and to offer our help with open hands and

hearts. May we walk in unity and grace, bringing light to the darkness. Amen. Ask me to edit or delete your scheduled action at any time. *Amen*.

Devotion 10

The Welcome You Didn't Earn

Scripture

"Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'" — Acts 10:34–35, NRSVCE

Reflection

On February 4, many Christians remember Cornelius the Centurion, a man whose story quietly changed the shape of the church. In the book of Acts, Cornelius is introduced as a Roman officer, a Gentile, and therefore, by the religious assumptions of the time, an outsider to the covenant life of Israel. He stood on the other side of boundaries built from culture, politics, and ritual law. Yet God did something remarkable. He gave Peter a vision that shattered those boundaries and led him directly to Cornelius's house. When Peter finally stood there and understood what God was doing, he realized that the good news of Jesus Christ was not reserved for one group, one people, or one spiritual class. The door of grace had been opened to the whole world. In that moment, the church learned that the invitation of God is wider than human prejudice, and that realization still has the power to reshape our hearts today.

The story of Cornelius also corrects a common misunderstanding about conversion. Many people imagine becoming a Christian as if it were a demanding self-improvement project. They assume they must first clean up their habits, get control of their weaknesses, learn the right words, and become spiritually respectable before God will pay attention to them. Faith can begin to feel like climbing a ladder toward acceptance, one rung of moral effort at a time. But Cornelius's story tells a different story. It reminds us that God is the one who takes the initiative. He is not standing at a distance, waiting for us to become perfect enough to deserve His notice. He is already moving toward us. He is already making a way. Conversion is not the human achievement of reaching God; it is the grace-filled response to the God who has already come near.

A simple picture may help. Imagine the first day at a new job in a large, bustling corporate office. You enter the company cafeteria with your tray in hand and immediately feel out of place. Every table seems occupied by people who already know each other. They share the inside jokes, the rhythms, the small signals of belonging that newcomers do not yet understand. You stand there awkwardly, feeling both entirely visible and strangely invisible. You want to sit somewhere, but you fear choosing the wrong place, intruding where you do not belong, or exposing how uncertain you feel. In that moment, you know what it means to be an outsider.

Now imagine that the CEO—someone you assumed was far beyond your reach—looks up, smiles, waves you over, and pulls out the chair beside them. "Sit here," they say. "There is room for you."

Everything changes in that moment. You have not earned the seat by knowing the history of the company or proving your productivity. You have not mastered the culture or demonstrated your

value. You have simply been welcomed. Your place at the table begins with invitation, not achievement. All you have to do is trust the welcome enough to sit down.

That is very close to the heart of conversion. It is not about climbing high enough to reach God. It is about realizing that God has already drawn near and made room for us. When Peter says that God accepts those who fear Him and do what is right, he is not speaking about terror, as though God must be appeased by frightened performance. He is speaking of reverent turning—an awakening to who God is and who we are in relation to Him. It is the moment a person stops running, stops pretending, stops trying to earn belonging, and instead turns toward the God who has already extended welcome. Our acts of obedience, our efforts to do what is right, are not payment for admission. They are the grateful response of hearts that have already been invited in.

This matters deeply because so many people carry the quiet suspicion that they are disqualified from God. Some feel too broken, too messy, too compromised by their past. Others assume that faith belongs to people who have always known the right language, moved in the right circles, or figured out how to look holy in public. But the story of Cornelius breaks those assumptions open. Cornelius was sincere and searching, but he was still outside the accepted boundaries of the community Peter knew. Yet God moved heaven and earth to bring Peter to his door. That is how determined God is to welcome those who seek Him. Belonging, in God's kingdom, comes before full transformation. It is the experience of being welcomed that begins to change us from the inside out.

That truth also challenges those of us who already see ourselves as believers. Peter himself had to be converted again in a deeper sense. He had to confront the prejudices and assumptions he carried about who belonged and who did not. Even a faithful disciple can still be surprised by the wideness of God's mercy. So the story of Cornelius does not only comfort seekers; it also searches believers. It asks us whom we have quietly placed outside the reach of grace. Is there a neighbor, a coworker, or a family member we have written off as uninterested, too difficult, too worldly, or too far gone? Have we acted as though God's welcome stops where our comfort ends? Peter had to learn that what God has made clean, he must not call unclean. That lesson remains urgent. To follow Christ is to become a person whose life reflects the open door of God.

For those who are seeking, Cornelius offers hope. You do not need to have every question answered before you turn toward God. You do not need a polished testimony or a perfected life. You can begin with honesty. A simple prayer—"Lord, I want to know if I am welcome. If You are there, show me"—is already a step toward the light. And for those who have long believed, Cornelius offers a needed reminder: our calling is not to guard the table, but to reflect the generosity of the One who set it.

"Doing what is right" often begins in very ordinary ways. It may mean telling the truth when a lie would be easier, offering help when no one is watching, extending kindness to someone you usually avoid, or choosing forgiveness over resentment. These are not attempts to purchase God's love. They are small but real ways of saying yes to the welcome already given. They are how grace begins to take shape in a human life.

The story of Cornelius proves that no one is disqualified from God's love because of background, past failure, or social standing. Conversion is the relief of discovering that you do not have to

become perfect before you are loved. You are invited first. You are welcomed first. The door is already open, and the seat is already waiting. All that remains is to trust the invitation enough to step inside.

Prayer

Gracious and impartial God, thank You that Your love knows no boundaries and plays no favorites. Thank You for the story of Cornelius, which reminds us that You are always the first to reach out, crossing every divide to find us. For those of us who feel like outsiders, give us the courage to trust Your welcome and take our place at Your table. For those of us who have been with You a long time, soften our hearts to see others as You see them—beloved and invited. Help us to fear You with holy awe and to do what is right, not to earn Your love, but because we have already been loved. *Amen*.

Section II

Learning to Pray and Trust

Prayer is not always eloquent. Often it is halting, honest, and born out of need. Trust is learned much the same way—through daily surrender, repeated dependence, and the slow discovery that God is faithful. These devotions invite the reader into a deeper posture of listening, humility, and reliance upon the Lord. Here, prayer becomes more than words; it becomes a way of abiding.

Devotion 11

Listening for God's Voice in the Stillness

Scripture

"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." — Psalm 46:10, NRSVCE

Reflection

The early morning hours carry a sacred stillness all their own. Before the noise of the day begins, before obligations gather their weight, and before distractions claim our attention, there is often a quiet space that feels especially suited for prayer, reflection, and listening. It is in those hours that many people turn most naturally toward God. The heart is less crowded then. The mind is less scattered. For those of us who write, teach, pray, or serve in ministry, those early moments can feel like holy ground. Yet even there, an honest question can rise: am I truly listening for God's voice, or am I simply following the momentum of my own thoughts?

That is not a small question. In ministry, it is possible to become so accustomed to speaking about God that we forget how to sit quietly before Him. We may pray, study, prepare, and serve with sincerity, yet still move too quickly from our own thoughts to our own words. Psalm 46:10 speaks with simple and searching clarity: "Be still, and know that I am God." That verse is often quoted as a comfort in troubled times, and rightly so, but it is also an instruction for the life of faith. It reminds us that God is not encountered only in activity, effort, or speech. He is also encountered in stillness. He is known not only when we are speaking to Him, but also when we have become quiet enough to recognize His presence and sovereignty.

That can be difficult, especially for those who are trying to serve Him well. The busyness of ministry can create a subtle illusion: because the work is good, we assume our pace is healthy; because the subject is spiritual, we assume every thought that comes to mind must be divinely shaped. But good work can still become hurried work, and sincere intentions can still outrun attentive listening. There is a difference between speaking for God and speaking after having listened to God. The distinction may not always be visible to others at first, but it matters deeply in the soul.

An old story captures this truth well. A man longed desperately to hear from God. He prayed often, fasted sincerely, and read Scripture faithfully, yet he still felt as though no clear direction was coming. Frustrated, he went to an older, wiser pastor and asked, "Why isn't God speaking to me?" The pastor listened and then gently asked, "Have you tried sitting in silence and simply waiting for Him?" The man protested that he was constantly praying and studying. The pastor smiled and said, "That is good. But prayer is not only talking. It is also listening." There is wisdom in that simple reply. Many of us know how to fill the silence with our requests, our plans, our worries, and even our service. Far fewer of us know how to leave room for God to interrupt us, redirect us, or deepen us through quiet attentiveness.

That lesson is especially important for anyone who writes devotionals, teaches Scripture, or offers spiritual guidance to others. It is easy to begin with a topic, a burden, a phrase, or an idea and immediately move into shaping it for others. Sometimes that process is fruitful. But

sometimes what feels clear at first is simply the echo of our own concerns, assumptions, or preferences. The question is not whether we have thoughts worth sharing. The question is whether we have allowed God's Word and God's presence to search and shape those thoughts before we offer them. It is possible to write what we think people need to hear while never fully pausing to ask what God would actually have us say.

That is why stillness is not a luxury in ministry; it is a necessity. Stillness does not mean passivity, nor does it require mystical certainty. It simply means making room for God to be God before we rush to become useful. It means beginning not with output, but with surrender. It means sitting with Scripture long enough for it to speak to us before we attempt to explain it to someone else. It means letting silence expose the clutter in our own hearts—the ambition, anxiety, eagerness, or self-consciousness that can quietly shape what we produce. And it means being willing to discover that the first work God wants to do may not be through us, but in us.

There are practical ways to cultivate this kind of listening. Before beginning the work of writing, teaching, or serving, it helps to begin with a simple prayer of surrender: "Lord, what would You have me say today? What would You have me see? What in me needs to grow quiet before You?" After that, a few moments of actual silence matter. Not filling the room with more words, not reaching immediately for a keyboard or notebook, but simply waiting. That waiting may feel unproductive at first. It may even feel uncomfortable. Yet over time, it becomes a form of trust. We are reminding ourselves that ministry is not powered by our cleverness, but by God's grace.

Meditating on Scripture in this way also changes how we approach our work. Instead of asking only, "What can I say about this passage?" we begin to ask, "What is this passage saying to me? Where is it correcting me, comforting me, or calling me deeper?" That shift matters. It moves us from performance to communion. It reminds us that we are not merely spiritual communicators but disciples ourselves, still being taught, still being formed, still needing the very truth we hope to share with others.

Listening also requires openness to redirection. Sometimes the truest evidence of God's guidance is not the ease with which words come, but the willingness to discard what seemed clever because it was not what He was asking us to carry. Sometimes faithfulness means rewriting. Sometimes it means waiting longer. Sometimes it means laying aside a thought we were attached to because a quieter and truer word has begun to emerge. That kind of surrender can feel costly, especially when deadlines, routines, or expectations press upon us. But it is often there, in the willingness to let go of our first impulses, that deeper faithfulness begins.

The still moments before dawn are a precious gift, not because they automatically make us more spiritual, but because they offer us an opportunity to meet God without pretense. In those hours, before the world becomes loud, we can remember that the most important part of ministry is not first speaking, but listening. Even in work done for God, we can accidentally drown out His voice with our own urgency, our own assumptions, or our own need to produce. But when we practice stillness, when we make room for silence, when we let Scripture form us before we try to form others, we begin to speak from a different place. Our words become less like personal momentum and more like faithful response.

That is a grace worth seeking. For when we learn to be still before God, we do not become empty. We become attentive. And in that attentiveness, our writing, our teaching, our praying,

and our serving can be shaped not merely by our own thoughts, but by the gentle, steady voice of the One we long to follow.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in the quiet of the morning, I come before You. I long to hear Your voice and to be guided by Your Spirit as I write and share Your Word. Help me to be still, to listen, and to discern what You would have me say. Let my thoughts align with Your truth so that my words may bring encouragement and inspiration to others. May all that I do be for Your glory. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 12

Trusting God with Our Lives

Scripture

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." — Romans 10:9, NRSVCE

Reflection

Every day, we place extraordinary trust in people we do not know. We sit down in restaurants believing the cook has prepared our food safely. We accept medical advice from doctors because we trust their training and judgment. We board airplanes and settle into our seats, trusting that the pilot knows how to bring us safely to our destination. In countless ordinary ways, we surrender control to strangers with remarkably little hesitation. We do this because life would be nearly impossible otherwise. Yet when it comes to entrusting our lives to God—the One who created us, knows us completely, and loves us more deeply than any human ever could—we often hesitate. We tighten our grip. We resist surrender. We ask questions, stall, and quietly wonder whether we can truly trust Him. That tension reveals something important about the human heart: control feels safer to us than surrender, even when the One inviting our trust is far more trustworthy than we are.

A familiar image helps bring this struggle into focus. Imagine driving behind a slow-moving semi-truck on a winding mountain road. The truck driver ahead of you signals for you to pass. In that moment, you make a choice. You trust that he can see more of the road than you can. You trust his judgment enough to act on it. You accelerate, move into the other lane, and pass safely. Then, glancing in the rearview mirror, you notice that others have followed your lead, also placing their confidence in the judgment of someone they have never met. It is a small but striking example of trust. You do not have complete visibility. You do not know every turn ahead. Yet you act because you believe someone else sees what you cannot.

That image is close to the kind of trust faith requires. Trusting God means acknowledging that He sees farther than we do. He knows what lies around bends in the road that remain hidden from us. He understands what we cannot yet understand. He sees the whole journey while we often can barely see the next few feet. And yet this is precisely where faith becomes difficult. Most of us do not mind trusting God in theory, but we struggle to release the steering wheel in practice. We like to feel in charge. We want guarantees, explanations, and visible proof. We wonder whether there is some hidden condition attached to grace. We ask whether faith is really enough, whether we must do more to earn salvation, whether God will truly guide us well, and whether surrender might somehow leave us exposed. Beneath many spiritual questions lies a quieter one: can I trust God with what matters most?

The gospel answers that question not with complication, but with clarity. Scripture does not present salvation as a maze of religious achievement. It does not tell us to earn God's acceptance by climbing a ladder of moral perfection. Instead, it points us to Jesus Christ and calls us to trust Him. Paul writes in Romans 10:9 that if we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. That is astonishing in its simplicity. Salvation is not a prize for the spiritually impressive. It is the gift of God received

through faith in His Son. At its heart, conversion is an act of surrendering trust—placing the weight of one's life, hope, and eternity into the hands of Jesus.

That does not mean faith is shallow or easy. Trust is simple, but it is not superficial. It asks us to hand over not only our sins, but also our illusions of self-sufficiency. It asks us to stop trying to save ourselves through effort, image, or control. It asks us to admit that we do not see the road clearly enough to direct our own souls. This can be unsettling, because the human heart prefers to keep some part of life in reserve. We may want God's help without yielding God lordship. We may want forgiveness without surrender. But biblical faith is not merely agreeing that God exists or that Jesus matters. It is entrusting ourselves to Him. It is saying, in effect, "You see what I cannot see. You know what I cannot know. I will place my life in Your hands."

Even then, questions remain. There is much in this life we do not fully understand. We do not always understand why God leads as He does, why some prayers seem delayed, why suffering touches certain roads, or why clarity comes slowly. Scripture does not deny that mystery. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul says that now we see only dimly, as in a mirror. Our knowledge remains partial. Yet that verse also points us toward hope: one day we shall see more clearly. In the meantime, the Christian life is not built on complete understanding, but on faithful trust. We walk by faith, not by sight. We move forward because we know the character of the One who leads us, even when we cannot yet explain the road.

This trust begins in a decisive way, but it is also renewed daily. There is a moment when a person turns to Christ and places their life in His hands, and Scripture speaks of that moment with beautiful assurance. Ephesians 1:13 says that when we believe, we are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. God does not leave His people uncertain about whose they are. But while the decision to trust Christ is foundational, the life of discipleship unfolds as a daily practice of surrender. Every day we are invited again to trust, to seek, and to repent.

To trust means to surrender our will to God, believing that His wisdom is better than our control. To seek understanding means not pretending we have all the answers, but turning to prayer and Scripture because we believe God does. And to repent means more than feeling sorry for sin. It means turning away from self-direction and toward Christ, again and again, allowing Him to shape the course of our lives. Faith is not static. It becomes visible in these repeated acts of yielding.

So it is worth asking honestly: what keeps us from trusting Him completely? Is it fear of losing control? Is it disappointment from past wounds? Is it the habit of self-reliance? Is it the quiet suspicion that God may not truly be as good as He says He is? Whatever the reason, the invitation of Christ remains open. He is trustworthy. He sees the road ahead. He knows every danger, every turn, every unseen stretch, and every destination that lies beyond our current sight. He does not ask for our trust because He needs something from us. He asks because we need what only He can give.

Faith, then, is not about understanding every detail of God's plan. It is about trusting the One who holds the plan. We already practice trust every day with pilots, doctors, and strangers on the road. How much more, then, may we entrust ourselves to the God whose wisdom is perfect and whose love is without limit? The question is not whether He is trustworthy. The deeper question is whether we are ready to stop clutching the wheel and let Him lead.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I surrender my life into Your hands. I confess with my mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in my heart that You raised Him from the dead. Help me to trust You daily, even when I don't see the full picture. Strengthen my faith and guide my steps as I walk in Your truth. Thank You for the gift of salvation and for marking me with the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 13

Seeking First: A Lenten Priority Check

Scripture

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." — Matthew 7:7, NRSVCE

Reflection

It is the Thursday of the First Week of Lent, that point in the season when Ash Wednesday already feels a little farther behind us and the sincerity of our good intentions has begun to meet the friction of ordinary life. The ashes have been washed away. The fresh resolve of new Lenten promises may already be pressing against tired schedules, old habits, and familiar distractions. Spiritually, it can feel a bit like standing beside an early March garden bed: the ground is still hard, perhaps even frozen, the air still sharp with cold, and any visible sign of growth seems slow in coming. Lent often feels that way. It is not a season of instant harvest. It is a season of returning, reordering, and refocusing. It asks us to slow down enough to notice what lies beneath the surface and to ask what we are truly seeking in the landscape of our lives.

There is a particular kind of intensity that takes over when something essential is lost. Most of us know the feeling immediately. You are already a few minutes late. You reach for your keys, your wallet, or your phone, and instead of the familiar object, your hand closes on empty air. In an instant, your whole internal world shifts. Your heart rate rises. At first you search logically, checking the usual places, trying to stay calm. But then the search expands. You are looking in coat pockets you have not worn in weeks. You are checking under sofa cushions, retracing your steps from room to room, rehearsing every movement of the last hour. What a moment like that reveals is not just your frustration, but your focus. In that instant, your whole life narrows around one thing. You are asking, seeking, and knocking with all the urgency you possess. Every faculty of attention is pulled into one desire: find what matters.

Jesus uses that very language in Matthew 7:7: ask, search, knock. These are active, persistent words. They assume hunger, intention, and movement. Lent, however, presses a deeper question upon us. The question is not whether we are seekers. We already are. Human beings are always seeking something with the center of their energy. The real question is what we are seeking with that kind of urgency. What is it that makes our heart race, our thoughts circle, and our attention narrow? What is the object around which our lives quietly organize themselves?

That question becomes more searching when placed alongside the hard words of Jesus in Luke 6, where He speaks of blessings and woes. He warns those who are full now, those who laugh now, those who are satisfied with what this world can offer. He is not condemning joy, stability, or earthly blessings in themselves. Scripture does not ask us to despise a good meal, a secure home, or the affection of people we love. Rather, Jesus warns against mistaking those things for our highest good. He warns against a life in which comfort becomes the ceiling of our desire. If our greatest ambition is simply to remain full, comfortable, approved, and undisturbed, then we stop seeking God with real intensity. We stop knocking on the door of the Kingdom because we are too busy arranging the furniture in the foyer of a temporary life.

For many of us, if we are honest, the things we chase with the greatest energy are not always bad things, but they are often smaller things than the soul was made for. We seek financial security with exhausting devotion. We seek the approval of others. We seek physical ease, emotional control, a trouble-free day, or the reassurance that everything will stay manageable. When any of those things feel threatened, our anxious searching begins. We tear through the house of our lives looking for what has gone missing. Yet Christ gently, and sometimes painfully, asks us whether we have confused temporary needs with ultimate treasure.

His own life shows us another way. Jesus did not organize His life around comfort. He did not seek to remain full, secure, or insulated from pain. He emptied Himself in love. His priority was not self-protection, but redemption. He walked toward the needy, the wounded, and the lost. He sought the will of the Father with a single-mindedness deeper than any earthly ambition. That is why Lent is not merely about giving things up. It is about reorientation. Repentance is more than feeling sorry for sin. It is turning the whole direction of the heart. It is recognizing that we have been spending ourselves on lesser pursuits and hearing again the invitation to seek first the Kingdom of God.

This is where the image of the frozen garden becomes especially helpful. A gardener standing over hardened ground in early spring does not demand immediate blossoms. The gardener watches, waits, and looks more carefully. Beneath the frost, things are happening that the eye cannot yet fully see. Roots are holding, moisture is gathering, and life is preparing its quiet return. Lent calls us to that kind of watchfulness. It asks us to look for the first signs of grace breaking through frozen habits and distracted loves. It teaches us to seek not constant stimulation, but the presence of God. It reminds us that if we ask for Him, He will not hand us stones. He will give us what is truly life-giving. In the deepest sense, He gives us Himself.

That shift from frantic seeking to faithful seeking requires honesty. It may help, at the end of the day or in a quiet moment, to ask yourself a few plain questions. What occupied my thoughts most today? What did I chase, worry over, or rehearse in my mind again and again? What did I avoid bringing to God because I was determined to manage it on my own? And what opportunities for patience, mercy, or kindness stood before me like open doors? Did I step through them, or did I walk past because I was too preoccupied with my own concerns? These are not questions meant to shame us. They are meant to reveal the compass of our hearts. What we repeatedly seek tells us what we love most deeply.

And here is the hopeful part: Jesus does not speak in Matthew 7 with reluctance. He does not say, “Ask, and perhaps if you have earned enough favor, an answer might come.” He says, “Ask, and it will be given you.” The tragedy of our lives is often not that we ask too much of God, but that we ask too little. We settle for comfort when He desires to form character. We seek relief alone when He desires to bring resurrection life. We search frantically for keys that open temporary doors, while the Kingdom stands before us with a door already unlocked.

So this Lent, let us reorder our loves. Let us bring our searching hearts before God with honesty. Let us stop exhausting ourselves in pursuit of what cannot finally satisfy. Instead, let us ask, seek, and knock where true life is found. The Father is listening. The door is not barred. And beneath the frost of this season, grace is already at work.

Prayer

Gracious and attentive Father, we confess that our hearts are often crowded with lesser loves. We scramble after security, approval, and comfort, treating these gifts as if they were the Giver. Forgive us for the times we have sought to be full of the world rather than full of Your Spirit. In this season of Lent, reorder our priorities. Teach us to ask for what truly matters, to search for Your face in the frozen grounds of our daily lives, and to knock with the confidence of beloved children. May we find our top priority in Your love, which is the only thing that endures. In the name of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. *Amen*.

Devotion 14

Finding True Bread in the Wilderness

Scripture

"But [Jesus] answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'" — Matthew 4:4, NRSVCE

Reflection

In Matthew 4:4, Jesus answers temptation with words that reach far beyond physical hunger: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." That declaration stands at the heart of the Christian life because it names a truth we often forget. Our deepest needs cannot be satisfied by quick fixes, visible comforts, or whatever appears most immediately within reach. Human beings need more than bread for the body. We need the sustaining presence, truth, and faithfulness of God.

This becomes even clearer when we place Jesus' words alongside the wider witness of Scripture. In Genesis 2:15–17 and 3:1–7, Adam and Eve live in a garden full of abundance, yet they begin to suspect that God may be withholding something good from them. The temptation is not only about fruit. It is about trust. Will they believe that God's command is good, or will they decide that grasping for themselves is the better way? In Matthew 4:1–11, Jesus enters the wilderness hungry, tested, and weakened by fasting, yet where the first humans reached for control, He remains anchored in the Father. Romans 5:12–19 tells us what is at stake in that contrast: where human disobedience brought sin and brokenness, Christ's obedience opens the way to life. And when we see in ourselves the same restless hunger that pulled humanity astray in the beginning, Psalm 32 reminds us that confession is not the end of hope, but the doorway to mercy, freedom, and restoration.

That is why the real question is not whether we are hungry. We all are. The deeper question is where we turn when that hunger rises—whether we are hungry for comfort, control, approval, relief, security, or simply some quick assurance that we are going to be okay. Temptation rarely arrives with dramatic fanfare. More often it comes disguised as a reasonable solution to a very real need.

Think of what might be called the checkout-line moment of the soul. You have had a hard week. You feel drained by work, overlooked by people whose approval matters too much, and worn thin by the unrelenting demands of daily life. Then you pick up your phone. A sale notification appears. A message from someone you should not be entertaining lights up the screen. The endless scroll of distraction is ready and waiting. The inner voice begins almost immediately: *You deserve this little treat. One click won't matter. If God is not going to make me feel better right now, I will have to do it myself.* It feels small—a purchase, a hidden text, a harsh word justified by fatigue, an indulgence explained away because we are stressed. Yet at its core, it is the same old echo of Eden. It is the belief that the fruit in front of us is more real, more satisfying, and more reliable than the God we cannot see.

In Genesis, the serpent's strategy is to make Eve question God's goodness. "Did God really say?" The aim is not merely to encourage rule-breaking; it is to undermine trust. In the wilderness, the

devil does the same with Jesus. He attacks identity: “If you are the Son of God…” He attacks provision: “Turn these stones to bread.” The temptation is to use divine power to fix an immediate problem, to bypass hunger, to avoid waiting, and to prove worth through visible action. It is the offer of a quick fix for a deep hunger.

But Jesus resists in a way that reveals the heart of faithful living. He does not simply tighten His jaw and rely on raw willpower. He does not say, “I am strong enough to say no.” Instead, He roots Himself in truth. He speaks Scripture because Scripture names reality more clearly than temptation does. He refuses to let hunger redefine His identity. He refuses to let immediate discomfort determine whether the Father can be trusted. In essence, He says, “I do not need to turn stones into bread to know that I am loved. I do not need spectacle to prove that I am safe. My life is sustained not only by what fills the stomach, but by the relationship I have with my Father.” Where Adam and Eve grasped for what seemed desirable, Jesus held fast to the One who is truly life.

This is why the Fall is not only a moral failure. It is a failure of trust. We do not simply do wrong things because we enjoy rebellion. We reach for substitutes because we begin to doubt that God is enough. We try to satisfy the hunger in our souls with things that promise relief but cannot deliver lasting life—approval, comfort, control, success, distraction, substances, attention, performance, or the illusion of self-sufficiency. The problem is not only that these things disappoint. It is that they train us to seek bread where no true nourishment is found.

Romans 5 offers the good news that Jesus has entered that human pattern and rewritten it. He went into the wilderness and did what we could not do. He trusted where we distrust. He obeyed where we grasp. He remained faithful where we are so often fragile and easily led. That means the wilderness is not only a place of temptation; it is also the place where Christ has gone ahead of us and claimed victory on our behalf. And when we do fall—when we reach for the fruit again, click the link, say the cutting word, or seek comfort where we know it will not satisfy—we do not have to hide as Adam and Eve did. Psalm 32 gives us another path. “While I kept silence, my body wasted away.” Hiding exhausts the soul. Confession, however, opens the door to mercy. God is not waiting with harsh delight to expose us. He is waiting to become our hiding place in a truer sense—a shelter of forgiveness, restoration, and deliverance.

That is why the wilderness can also become a place of training. When temptation rises, one holy practice is to pause. Instead of moving immediately toward the quick fix, stop for thirty seconds. Breathe. Name the hunger beneath the urge: loneliness, stress, anger, insecurity, exhaustion. Then pray honestly: “Lord, I am hungry for peace. Help me not to settle for a cheap substitute.” Another practice is what might be called un-hiding. Bring one struggle into the light today. Admit it to God. Tell a trusted friend if needed. Secrecy gives temptation more room to grow, but confession weakens its grip. And because temptation usually rides in on a lie, answer it with a truth. When the heart says, “I have to perform to be valuable,” answer with the gospel: “I am God’s beloved child. I do not need to turn stones into bread to prove it.” Write that truth somewhere visible. Let it confront the false promise the next time it comes.

Then choose one act of small obedience. Let it be simple but real. Hold your tongue when criticism would come easily. Turn from the screen and pray instead. Lay down one comfort in

order to seek God more intentionally. These small acts matter, not because they earn love, but because they train the heart to trust where temptation urges it to grasp.

We are all prone to wander. We all know the gravitational pull of quick relief. But we are not left to face the wilderness alone. We have a Savior who has stood there, who has known hunger, pressure, and testing, yet remained faithful. Because He stood firm, we have solid ground beneath our feet. Because He is merciful, we have somewhere safe to turn when we stumble. So today, let us stop hiding, stop grasping, and turn again toward the One who is the Bread of Life. In Him, we do not merely find enough to get by. We find the true nourishment for which our souls were made.

Prayer

Merciful God, we thank You that You are not a God who abandons us in our weakness. You know how easily we are swayed by the shiny distractions of this world and how often we doubt Your goodness when we are hungry or tired. Forgive us for the times we have sought life in things that cannot satisfy. Thank You for Jesus, who faced the wilderness for us and showed us that true strength is found in trusting You. Give us the courage to be honest about our struggles, the grace to rest in Your forgiveness, and the resilience to choose the path of life today. *Amen*.

Devotion 15

Called from the Deep: Reoriented by Grace

Scripture

"Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.'" — Luke 5:10b, NRSVCE

Reflection

The sun is rising over the Lake of Gennesaret, but the mood on the shoreline is anything but bright. In Luke 5, the disciples are not standing in holy anticipation, waiting for revelation. They are tired, discouraged, and busy with the practical task of cleaning their equipment after a failed night of labor. They have worked through the darkness and caught nothing. Their nets are empty. The work feels wasted. The nets are being washed, which means the effort is over and disappointment has settled in. It is time to go home, sleep, and begin again another day.

It is precisely there, in that ordinary and dispiriting place, that Jesus steps into Simon Peter's boat. That detail matters because it challenges one of our most persistent spiritual assumptions. We often imagine that to encounter God, we must first get ourselves somewhere special. We assume that God is found in rare, elevated moments—a retreat center, a particularly moving worship service, a mountaintop view, or a quiet chapel far away from life's mess. We think we must step out of the ordinary in order to step into the holy. Yet Luke's Gospel tells a different story. God often chooses to meet us not outside our lives, but right in the middle of them. Jesus steps into the boat not when it is full of success, but when it is heavy with failure. He comes not when Peter is triumphant, but when he is tired.

What happens next begins in an almost unremarkable way. Jesus asks Simon to put out a little from the shore so He can teach the crowds. It is a simple request, grounded in the stuff of everyday life—wood, water, rope, labor. Before there is miracle, there is ordinary cooperation. Before Peter is overwhelmed by divine power, he is asked for a practical act of service. That, too, is revealing. God meets us in the rhythms of daily obligation—in the folding of laundry, the answering of emails, the driving to appointments, the paying of bills, the preparing of meals, and the washing of nets. He does not wait until our lives feel especially spiritual before drawing near. He enters the ordinary and uses it as the place of encounter.

But the encounter does not remain on the surface. After teaching, Jesus tells Simon to go deeper: "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Peter's response is honest and weary. He is an experienced fisherman, and by every professional measure, this is the wrong time, the wrong circumstance, and the wrong expectation. He has already done the work. He has already failed. Yet he says, "If you say so, I will let down the nets." There is something beautiful about that sentence. It is not polished faith. It is tired obedience. It is not enthusiastic certainty. It is trust offered in the face of disappointment.

And then comes the miracle. The catch is so abundant that the nets begin to break and two boats are filled nearly to sinking. But what is most striking is Peter's reaction. He does not first celebrate. He does not immediately calculate profit or savor the success. Instead, he falls at Jesus' knees and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Why does abundance

lead to confession? Because true encounter with the holy does not merely make us feel uplifted. It reveals us. When Peter comes face to face with the power and presence of Jesus, he suddenly sees himself more clearly too. His emptiness, his smallness, his inadequacy, his limits—all are exposed in the light of Christ's nearness.

That is often how God works. We may think what we need most is for our circumstances to improve, for our empty nets to become full, for our efforts finally to yield success. But sometimes the deeper gift is not the catch itself. It is the reorientation that happens when Jesus steps into our failure and shows us that our lives are not ultimately sustained by our competence. Peter realizes in that moment that his security does not rest in his skill, his labor, or his ability to control outcomes. He is not the true captain of his life. This is not a crushing moment of shame. It is a healing moment of truth. What is exposed is not exposed to destroy him, but to free him.

Jesus' response confirms this. He does not back away from Peter's confession. He does not say, "You are right, Simon, I should leave." Instead He says, "Do not be afraid." Then He gives Peter a new calling: "From now on you will be catching people." This is the turning point. The miracle of fish is not the final goal. The real miracle is the redirection of Peter's life. The One who fills the nets also re-aims the heart. The abundance on the water becomes secondary to the summons on the shore.

This pattern is not limited to ancient fishermen. It unfolds in ordinary lives all the time. Picture a parent sitting late at night at the kitchen table, staring at unpaid bills or worrying over a fractured relationship with a teenager. The effort feels exhausted. The nets are empty. Anxiety rises alongside the painful awareness of not being able to fix what matters most. Then, perhaps in quiet desperation, the parent finally stops striving long enough to whisper, "Lord, I cannot fix this." Nothing outward may change immediately. The bills do not vanish. The relationship may still be strained. But something shifts. A deep and unforced peace settles into the room. A spouse speaks a gracious word. A clearer next step emerges. The heart moves from frantic control to humble reliance. The miracle is not necessarily instant resolution. The miracle is the reorientation from self-sufficiency to trust.

That is what happened for Peter. Luke says that after bringing the boats to land, they left everything and followed Jesus. They walked away not only from empty nets, but from the greatest catch they had ever seen. Why? Because once they encountered the One behind the miracle, the old measure of success could no longer hold them. Their direction had changed. They moved from seeking what nets could hold to following the One who held their lives. They went from building identity around what they could produce to building it around the One who called them.

The same invitation comes to us. We may not be fishermen on Galilean waters, but we know what it is to wash empty nets. We know the tasks that feel fruitless, the relationships that seem stalled, the efforts that have yielded little but fatigue. The question is whether we will live as though those empty nets define us, or whether we will remain open to Jesus stepping into that very place. One helpful practice is simply to ask at day's end, "Where did I see Jesus in the interruptions today?" Often the deep water to which we are called is hidden inside the inconvenience we tried to avoid. Another practice is to name one area where your nets feel

empty and consciously invite Jesus into it—not as a last resort, but as Lord. Offer one act of service there, not as a way to force results, but as an act of trust. And when fear or the urge to control rises, pause long enough to whisper, “Lord, I will follow where You lead.”

We cannot manufacture miracles, nor can we schedule encounters with God on our own terms. But we can live awake. We can wash our nets with an eye toward the shore, expecting that Jesus still comes to ordinary people in ordinary places. The good news is that when we feel most unworthy—when, like Peter, we are most aware of our emptiness—Jesus does not withdraw. He draws near. He does not come to shame our empty nets, but to fill our lives with His presence. And when He does, He invites us into a new direction, one in which we are no longer defined by what we catch, but by the One we choose to follow.

Prayer

Lord of the deep waters, we confess that we often look for You only in the spectacular, missing You in the mundane moments of our days. Forgive us for the times we trust in our own toiling and tangled nets rather than in Your command. When we are overwhelmed by Your holiness and our own weakness, help us to hear Your voice saying, "Do not be afraid." Grant us the courage to drop our defenses, leave behind our need for control, and follow You into the new direction You have prepared for us—a life of catching people with the net of Your love. *Amen*.

Devotion 16

Roots in the Divine: The Quiet Work of the Trinity

Scripture

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." — 2 Corinthians 13:13, NRSVCE

Reflection

These words from the Apostle Paul are familiar to many Christians because they are often heard in church as a closing blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Yet this verse is far more than a beautiful farewell. It opens a window into the mystery at the very heart of the Christian faith: the Triune life of God. In this one sentence, Paul names the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, not as distant theological ideas, but as the living God who meets us with grace, love, and communion. The blessing is not merely spoken over us. It reveals the shape of the divine life into which we are invited.

That mystery has occupied the minds and hearts of Christians for centuries, and one of the church's great guides in thinking about it was Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory was one of the Cappadocian Fathers, alongside his brother Basil of Caesarea and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, all of whom helped defend and clarify the church's confession of the Trinity. Gregory's life reminds us that theology is not meant to be cold or abstract. For him, the mystery of God was not a puzzle to be solved so much as a reality into which believers are drawn. He understood that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not separate powers competing for attention, but the one God who brings us into a deep, transforming relationship of love, a relationship that unfolds slowly and faithfully over a lifetime.

When many people first try to imagine the Trinity, they picture God almost as three separate workers taking turns in the universe—sometimes the Father acting, sometimes the Son, sometimes the Spirit. But Gregory of Nyssa taught something far more beautiful. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, yet never divided. Their life is one, their action inseparable, their love eternally shared. In theological language, this reality has often been described with the word *perichoresis*, though the truth it names can be understood in simpler terms: wherever one Person of the Trinity is at work, the whole life of God is present. The Father never acts apart from the Son and the Spirit. The Son is never detached from the Father and the Spirit. The Spirit never comes without the Father and the Son. God's grace, love, and saving work are always the united work of the whole Trinity.

A helpful image for this is that of three gifted musicians performing a piece of chamber music. Imagine a pianist, a violinist, and a cellist seated together, each with a different instrument and each reading a distinct line of music. If you look closely, you can see their individuality. Their parts are not identical. Yet when they begin to play, you do not hear three separate songs competing against one another. You hear one beautiful harmony. They watch one another, breathe together, and move in exquisite unity. Each note depends on the others, and the music is richer precisely because the parts are distinct yet inseparable. That harmony offers a glimpse, however partial, of the life of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in eternal, joyful

communion, never isolated, never in conflict, never out of step. God's life is not solitary but relational, a perfect fellowship of love.

What makes this more than theology for the mind is that salvation itself is participation in that life. Gregory of Nyssa believed that God does not save us merely by rescuing us from danger and leaving us unchanged. He draws us into His own life. The ancient Christian word *theosis* speaks of this mystery: by grace, we are invited to share in the life of God. Not that we become divine by nature, but that we are gradually transformed through communion with the Triune God. Salvation, then, is not simply about reaching a destination called heaven. It is about being shaped, day by day, into deeper fellowship with the God whose life is perfect love.

That transformation is often quieter than we expect. Many of us look for spiritual growth in dramatic experiences—moments of sudden insight, emotional breakthroughs, or extraordinary signs. Sometimes God does work in striking ways. But more often, sharing in the life of the Trinity happens through what might be called quiet formation. It is the patient, hidden work of grace in the ordinary texture of life. It is less like fireworks and more like the growth of an ancient oak. Year after year, its roots stretch deeper into the unseen earth, drawing up nourishment in ways the eye cannot detect from day to day. If you stood and watched it for an afternoon, you would see little change. But over time, what seemed still is transformed into strength, depth, and stability. So it is with the soul. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are at work in the hidden soil of our daily lives, drawing our roots deeper into divine love.

This means that spiritual growth is often happening in places we overlook. It takes shape in repeated prayer, even when prayer feels quiet and unremarkable. It grows through ordinary faithfulness, through acts of mercy, through repentance, through worship, through Scripture read with attentiveness, through patience learned in suffering, and through small obediences that seem unimpressive to the world. The Triune God is not only present in dramatic moments. He is present in the middle of an ordinary day, at a kitchen sink, in a workplace, in a hospital room, in a tired conversation, or in a quiet walk when no great revelation seems to arrive. Grace is at work there. Love is at work there. Communion is at work there. The whole Trinity is active, drawing us further into the fellowship for which we were made.

One helpful way to become more aware of this quiet formation is to practice noticing God's presence in the middle of ordinary moments. Set aside a single minute sometime during the day. Let it arrive not in a special sanctuary, but in the middle of life, wherever you happen to be. Pause, take a breath, and slowly pray Paul's blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with me." Let those words become more than memory. Let them become rest. Let yourself receive the truth that the Triune God is not far away, nor waiting for you to become more impressive before drawing near. He is already present, already surrounding you with grace, love, and communion, already growing your roots deeper in His life.

Spiritual growth is rarely an overnight event. More often, it is a lifelong quiet formation rooted in the faithful presence of God. We are not asked to master the mystery of the Trinity as though we could solve God with our minds. We are asked to trust Him, to receive His life, and to let ourselves be drawn more deeply into His love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distant observers of your life. They are actively, inseparably present, shaping you with a patience deeper

than you know. And as that work continues, you are being drawn, slowly and surely, into the eternal fellowship of divine love.

Prayer

Almighty God, we praise You for the beautiful mystery of Your being—that You are one God, forever united in love. We give thanks to You, Father, through Your Son Jesus Christ, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for not leaving us to grow on our own, but for inviting us to share in Your eternal life by grace. Transform our hearts in the quiet, hidden places. Make us more like Christ, steadying our roots when the winds of life blow cold, and drawing us into Your divine harmony. Give us the patience to trust in Your slow, faithful work within us today and always. *Amen*.

Devotion 17

The Spirit of Truth and the Mystery of the Trinity

Scripture

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." — John 16:13, NRSVCE

Reflection

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. Christians confess that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons. Although the word *Trinity* does not appear in Scripture, the reality it names is woven throughout the biblical story. In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as distinct from Himself and from the Father, yet perfectly united with them. The Spirit is not an independent force or a vague spiritual energy. He is the living presence of God, sent to guide believers into truth and to make known what belongs to the Father and the Son. This mystery stretches the mind, but it is not given to us merely to puzzle over. It is given so that we may know more deeply who God is and how God meets us in grace.

One way to picture this is to imagine a lighthouse on a stormy night. A ship is fighting wind and waves, and visibility is poor. The captain cannot see the keeper inside the lighthouse, but he sees the beam cutting through the darkness. He trusts that light because it is steady, clear, and oriented toward safety. The keeper, the tower, and the guiding beam are not identical, yet together they serve one purpose: to guide those at sea toward safe passage. No image can fully explain the Trinity, and every comparison falls short if pressed too far, but this one does offer a glimpse of how God's work reaches us. The Father sends, the Son reveals, and the Spirit guides, not as three separate agents pursuing different goals, but in perfect unity. The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the guidance of the Spirit are not competing works. They are the one saving action of the one God.

Jesus speaks of that harmony in a way that is both simple and profound. The Spirit, He says, will not speak on His own, but will declare what He hears. He will glorify the Son by taking what belongs to the Son and making it known to believers. And because all that the Father has belongs to the Son, the Spirit's guidance is nothing less than the self-disclosure of God. This is not a divine relay race in which one person finishes and another begins. It is the beautiful unity of the Triune God. The Spirit does not invent a new message. He leads us more deeply into the truth of Christ, and in leading us to Christ, He brings us into the love of the Father. The more we attend to the Spirit, the more we are drawn into the shared life of God Himself.

That matters because many Christians think of the Trinity only as a difficult doctrine to be explained correctly, rather than as the living reality of their daily relationship with God. Yet the Trinity is not merely something to define. It is how God comes to us and how we come to know Him. We pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and indwelt and guided by the Spirit. The Christian life is shaped at every point by this divine communion. To know God truly is to know Him as Trinity—not as an abstract formula, but as the God who creates, redeems, comforts, sanctifies, and leads.

The image of the lighthouse is especially helpful because so much of life feels like sailing through uncertain water. There are seasons when the way ahead is unclear, when the waves of decision, suffering, fear, or confusion make it hard to know which direction to take. In those moments, the Spirit's work may seem quiet, even hidden. We do not see Him in the way we see material things. We cannot always describe how He is leading with precision. Yet His guidance is no less real for being unseen. Like the beam from the lighthouse, the Spirit often gives enough light for the next step rather than the whole journey at once. He reminds us of Christ's words, steadies our hearts with truth, convicts us when we are drifting, comforts us in sorrow, and gently redirects us when we are tempted to trust our own wisdom more than God's.

This guidance is not detached from the rest of God's life. The Spirit does not lead us somewhere the Son would not go or teach us something the Father does not will. He brings us into alignment with the heart of God. That is why life in the Spirit is always Christ-centered and Godward. The Spirit does not draw attention to Himself as though He were separate from the Father and the Son. His joy is to make Christ known, and through Christ to bring us into the Father's love. In that sense, the Spirit's humility teaches us something profound about divine life itself. God is not a solitary power turned inward upon Himself. God is eternal communion, eternal self-giving, eternal love.

When we begin to grasp even a little of this, our faith becomes more than private belief or moral effort. It becomes participation in the life of God. We start to see that prayer is not just sending requests into the sky, but being drawn into communion with the Father through the Son by the Spirit. Worship becomes more than routine; it becomes a response to divine love already surrounding us. Obedience becomes more than duty; it becomes cooperation with the Spirit who is shaping us into the likeness of Christ. The Trinity is not a distant puzzle for theologians only. It is the living pattern of the Christian life.

So it is worth asking in a personal way: am I allowing the Holy Spirit to guide my decisions, or am I relying only on what seems obvious to me? Do I seek the wisdom of the Father through the teachings of Christ, or do I treat faith as something occasional and disconnected from ordinary choices? When I feel uncertain, do I pause long enough to ask for the Spirit's guidance, trusting that God is not absent in the storm? These questions are not meant to create anxiety, but awareness. The Triune God is already nearer than we often realize. The issue is not whether He is present, but whether we are willing to attend to His presence.

The Trinity is not merely a theological concept to admire from a distance. It is the very shape of God's saving relationship to us. The Father sent the Son to redeem us, and the Son sent the Spirit to dwell within us and lead us into all truth. We are invited into that divine life, not as spectators, but as beloved children drawn into communion. And like a lighthouse guiding a ship through darkness, the Spirit of truth continues to illuminate our path, keeping us oriented toward Christ and held within the love of God. In the storms of life, that is no small comfort. It is safe passage in the presence of the One who is, eternally, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we stand in awe of Your divine mystery—the beauty of the Trinity. Thank You for sending Your Son to save us and Your Spirit to guide us in truth. Help us to listen to the voice of the Spirit, to follow Christ's example, and to rest in Your unfailing love. May we live each day

aware of Your presence, growing in faith and walking in unity with You. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, *Amen*.

Devotion 18

The Truth in the Dust: We Are Beggars

Scripture

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." — Psalm 51:17, NRSVCE

Reflection

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season of forty days set aside for reflection, repentance, and preparation for Easter. It is a solemn threshold in the Christian year, a day that asks us to pause long enough to face a truth we often spend much of our lives trying to avoid: our own fragility. Whether ashes are placed on our foreheads in public worship or whether we simply hold the day quietly in our hearts, the message remains the same: we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Yet this reminder is not given to drive us into despair. It is meant to lead us into honesty. It brings us to the place where true relationship with God begins—not in performance, strength, or denial, but in an open heart that knows its need for grace.

There is a phrase closely associated with Martin Luther, written near the end of his life, that captures the spirit of Ash Wednesday with startling simplicity: "We are beggars. This is true." Few lines say so much with so little. It is a confession about what we are before God. We are not self-sufficient. We are not rich in righteousness. We are not people who can bargain our way into divine favor. Beneath all our accomplishments, appearances, and efforts to seem stronger than we are, we stand before God as people in need. That is not an insult. It is a truth that can finally set the soul free.

To understand this, imagine standing at a grocery store checkout line. Your cart contains the ordinary essentials of life, things you genuinely need for the week ahead. The cashier rings them up and gives you the total. You reach for your wallet, only to discover that it is not there. You check your pocket again, then your coat, then your bag, but there is nothing. A flush of panic rises through your body. The need is real. The goods are in front of you. But you do not have the means to pay. In that moment, all your plans collapse into one reality: you have empty hands. You cannot complete the transaction through effort or determination. You can only receive mercy if it is given.

Spiritually, Ash Wednesday brings us to that kind of counter. We often try to approach God as though we are carrying enough currency to make ourselves acceptable. We offer our achievements, our church attendance, our decency, our reputation, our efforts to do better, and our carefully maintained image. We hope, at least quietly, that these things might prove we are worthy of love, forgiveness, or security. But the ashes tell the truth. We are dust. Our hands are not full of merit. And the phrase "we are beggars" tells the truth as well. We cannot buy God's love. We cannot earn eternal life. We cannot secure ourselves against death by the strength of our own goodness.

At first, that may sound discouraging. But it becomes good news the moment we understand who God is. God is not looking for customers. He is not asking us to make a transaction. He is not a merchant requiring proof of our worth before He will act with kindness. He is a Father

seeking children, a Savior seeking the lost, a giver of grace to those who know they need it. As long as we insist on pretending we are spiritually rich, our hands remain too full to receive anything. But when we admit the truth—when we acknowledge that we are dusty, mortal, and empty-handed before Him—something opens in us. The very emptiness we fear becomes the place where grace can finally be received.

That is why Ash Wednesday is not only about mortality. It is also about mercy. The ashes are not merely a mark of limitation; they are a mark of truth. They say, "I cannot do this on my own." And the gospel answers, "You were never meant to." God does not recoil from our emptiness. He meets it. He fills what we cannot fill. He gives what we cannot buy. He places into the open hands of beggars the bread of life in Jesus Christ. What we cannot earn, He gives. What we cannot manufacture, He supplies. What we cannot sustain in ourselves, He sustains by grace.

This is why Lent begins not with triumph, but with confession. We are not invited first to impress God with our discipline. We are invited to tell the truth. Psalm 51, so often associated with this season, understands this deeply: the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. God is not pleased with our religious performance when it is detached from honesty. He is pleased by truth in the inward being. Ash Wednesday strips away some of our excuses and brings us back to that essential place. We are reminded that life is short, that death is real, that our control is limited, and that grace is necessary.

There is also a strange relief in this. Pretending to be spiritually self-sufficient is exhausting. Trying to appear strong, righteous, and capable enough to manage life without deep dependence on God wears the soul down. But there is freedom in laying that burden down. There is freedom in saying, "Lord, I am needy. I do not have enough. I cannot save myself. I cannot even hold myself together apart from Your mercy." Such honesty is not failure. It is the beginning of wisdom. It is the beginning of prayer. And it is often the beginning of healing.

So one fitting practice for this season is what might be called the discipline of empty hands. Sit quietly, even for a minute or two, with your palms open in your lap. Let your body say what your heart needs to learn: I come to God not full, but empty. Not proving, but receiving. Not negotiating, but trusting. Another fitting practice is hidden generosity. If we are beggars living by grace, then we are free to give without needing applause. A quiet act of kindness done for no recognition at all becomes a beautiful Lenten prayer. And because noise so often helps us avoid our deeper need, a small fast from constant media or background sound can also open space for the truth of Ash Wednesday to settle more deeply into us.

Ash Wednesday brings our mortality and God's mercy into the same frame. It reminds us that we are made of earth and that our days are not endless. But it also reminds us that the eternal God loves us. We are beggars, and this is true. Yet we are beggars who have been invited to the table. We are dust, yet dust deeply loved. We are empty-handed, yet offered the bread of heaven. This is why the day is solemn but not hopeless. It calls us to stop pretending we are self-sufficient and to begin Lent where grace begins: with open hands, honest hearts, and the humble courage to receive what only God can give.

Prayer

Merciful God, you formed us from the dust of the earth and breathed life into us. Today, we acknowledge that we are frail and often lose our way. We come to you with empty pockets and open hands, admitting that we cannot earn your favor. Thank you that you do not despise a humble heart. Wash us, renew us, and walk with us through this Lenten season. May we find our treasure not in what we can achieve, but in who You are. In the name of Jesus, who became poor so that we might become rich. *Amen*.

Devotion 19

Beyond the Horizon of Our Imagination

Scripture

"For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." — 2 Timothy 1:7, NRSVCE

Reflection

New technology almost always brings a mixture of wonder and worry. Human beings are fascinated by what can be built, yet unsettled by what they do not fully understand. One of the landmark moments in that long story came when a computer named Deep Blue defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov in a regulation game, showing in a dramatic way that machines could calculate and compete at a level many people had never imagined. Since then, technology has advanced rapidly, and that rapid change has created unease for many people, including many Christians. Artificial Intelligence can feel powerful, confusing, and unfamiliar. It can raise hard questions about truth, work, wisdom, and the future. Yet the Apostle Paul reminds believers that fear is not the language God has given His people. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-discipline. That means we are not called to meet the unknown with panic, but with discernment, steadiness, and trust.

To approach something wisely, we first need to understand what it is. In simple terms, AI is a human-made system designed to recognize patterns, make predictions, or generate responses based on the data and instructions it has received. It is a tool. In most cases, it is built for narrow tasks—translating words, organizing information, recommending music, identifying patterns in medical images, drafting text, or helping people sort through large amounts of material more quickly. At its core, it is mathematics, code, and processing power working together according to human design. Understanding that matters, because fear often grows in the dark. The less we understand, the more our imagination fills the gaps with worst-case possibilities.

It is just as important to understand what AI is not. It is not divine. It does not possess a soul, a conscience, or the breath of God. It does not pray. It does not worship. It does not carry moral wisdom in itself. It is not an objective source of ultimate truth. Because it is built by human beings and trained on human-created data, it can be biased, mistaken, shallow, or misleading. It can produce answers without possessing understanding in the way a human person understands. And no matter how sophisticated it may seem, it can never replace the work of the Holy Spirit, the authority of Scripture, the life of the church, or the need for prayerful discernment. A machine can process information, but it cannot know God as a redeemed human heart can know Him.

That distinction is crucial, because Christians are sometimes tempted toward two opposite errors. One is to demonize technology, treating every new development as though it were automatically evil. The other is to embrace technology uncritically, as though innovation itself were proof of goodness or wisdom. Neither response is faithful. The Christian calling is not blind fear or blind acceptance. It is discernment. Scripture tells us to test everything and hold fast to what is good. That means we can look at powerful tools honestly, acknowledge both their usefulness and their limits, and refuse to grant them authority they were never meant to have.

A simple comparison may help. Think of a GPS in a car. It can be extremely useful. It analyzes maps, traffic patterns, and routes, then offers guidance to help a driver reach a destination more efficiently. But anyone who has driven long enough knows that a GPS can also be wrong. Maps can be outdated. Roads can be closed. A route that seems efficient on the screen may turn out to be unwise on the ground. The driver must still use eyes, judgment, and awareness. No wise person hands over total responsibility to the device. The GPS is a tool, not a master. It may assist with direction, but it cannot replace attentiveness. In a similar way, AI may be able to provide information, speed, or assistance, but it cannot offer the wisdom that comes from God. It cannot carry moral responsibility for us. It cannot decide what is loving, just, or holy. The Christian remains responsible before God for how tools are used and what authority is granted to them.

This matters because the deepest Christian concern is never merely what a tool can do, but what it is doing to the human heart. A tool can save time, but what will we do with the time it saves? A system can make communication easier, but will it deepen human love or encourage more distance? A machine can generate words, but will those words serve truth, compassion, and neighbor-love, or will they become a substitute for prayerful thought, human responsibility, and honest labor? The central question is not whether technology exists, but whether it is being used in ways that align with the character of Christ.

That is where Paul's words become especially important. A sound mind is part of Christian faithfulness. We are not asked to react impulsively, either by embracing every innovation because it is new or rejecting it because it is unfamiliar. We are invited to think clearly, love deeply, and act with self-control. Fear tends to exaggerate the power of the thing feared. But AI, however significant, is not the ruler of the world. It is not the author of history. It is not the judge of souls. It is not the giver of life. Tools may change rapidly, but the nature of God does not. Christ remains Lord. The Spirit still leads into truth. Scripture still forms the conscience of the believer. Prayer still opens the heart to wisdom. The church still offers discernment in community. None of that has been displaced.

So how do we walk faithfully in such a moment? One wise step is simply to learn enough that vague anxiety can give way to clearer understanding. Another is to practice discernment consistently. If a digital tool offers information, verify it. If it offers advice, weigh it. Bring decisions back to prayer, Scripture, and godly counsel rather than outsourcing your conscience to a machine. It is also wise to set boundaries. If constant news about future technologies stirs anxiety, step back from the noise. Go outside. Read Scripture. Pray. Re-center your mind on the Creator rather than becoming consumed by creation. And finally, ask how a tool might be used to love your neighbor well. Technology is healthiest when it serves human dignity rather than replacing it. A translation tool may help you communicate kindness to someone in another language. A scheduling tool may help you make room for family, service, or rest. A research tool may help you understand something more clearly. Use tools in ways that increase love, truth, and faithfulness.

Artificial Intelligence is a significant development in human history, but it is not the master of history. It is powerful, but not ultimate. It is useful, but not wise in itself. It may reshape parts of daily life, but it cannot alter the character of God or the calling of His people. Christians therefore do not need to be ruled by fear. We are free to approach the unknown with humble learning, careful discernment, and steady trust. Our confidence does not rest in the stability of

machines, but in the faithful presence of the Lord. So walk boldly and thoughtfully. Use what is good. Reject what is false. Test what is offered. And remember that the truest wisdom will never come from code alone, but from the God who gives His people a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

Prayer

Lord of all wisdom, we confess that we are sometimes frightened by how fast the world changes. When we see new technologies that we do not fully understand, we feel small and uncertain. Please replace our spirit of fear with Your spirit of power and sound judgment. Help us to see these new inventions not as idols or threats, but as tools that require Your guidance to use well. Grant us the discernment to know what is true and the courage to hold fast to what is good. Teach us to use tools with love and humility, ensuring that our reliance is always upon You. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 20

Cleaning Our Windows

Scripture

"Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." — Matthew 7:3-5, NRSVCE

Reflection

We live in a world of high-definition screens, instant updates, and endless opportunities to zoom in on details. Yet when it comes to the people around us, our vision is often surprisingly blurred. One of the most common human struggles is the ability to notice the faults of others with remarkable precision while remaining largely unaware of the distortions within our own hearts. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses this tendency with a deliberately vivid image: a person with a log in their own eye trying to remove a speck from someone else's. There is humor in the picture, but it is the kind of humor that exposes truth. Jesus is showing us that the real problem is not always what we are looking at, but what we are looking through. We often imagine that our judgments are objective and clear, when in fact they may be refracted through fatigue, resentment, insecurity, or wounds we have not allowed God to heal.

A simple story illustrates this beautifully. A young couple moved into a new neighborhood, and one morning as they ate breakfast, the wife looked out the window and saw her neighbor hanging laundry on the line. She frowned and remarked that the clothes did not look very clean. "She doesn't know how to wash properly," she said. "Perhaps she needs better detergent." Her husband said nothing. Over the following weeks, the same pattern repeated. Every time the neighbor hung up her clothes, the wife commented on how dingy, gray, or poorly washed they seemed. Then one morning she looked out again and was startled. "Look," she said, "her laundry is finally bright and clean. I wonder who taught her how to wash correctly?" Her husband replied gently, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

That little story is simple, but it carries a piercing truth. The problem had never been the neighbor's laundry. The problem was the window through which it was being viewed. And so it often is with us. What we think we see in others is frequently colored by the condition of our own hearts. The "dirt" we are convinced is on someone else may in fact be on the glass through which we are looking.

Jesus' image of the log and the speck makes the same point in even stronger terms. When we are quick to label someone as rude, lazy, incompetent, selfish, or unkind, we should pause long enough to ask whether we are actually seeing clearly. Human beings rarely judge from a neutral place. We judge from within our own tiredness, our disappointments, our frustrations, our old wounds, and our private fears. A person who feels unappreciated may easily interpret another's silence as rejection. Someone carrying unresolved hurt may see insult where none was intended. A weary parent may call a child defiant when the child is simply overwhelmed. A stressed worker may label a coworker careless when the real issue is their own frayed patience. The log in

the eye is not just obvious sin in the dramatic sense. It is any distortion within us that clouds our ability to see another person truthfully and lovingly.

This is why judgment is so spiritually dangerous. It does not merely affect how we speak about others; it shapes the very quality of our vision. We begin to believe that our perceptions are pure when they are actually filtered through inner grime. And because criticism can feel righteous, we often protect it instead of questioning it. It is easier to diagnose someone else than to examine ourselves. It is easier to focus on the speck than to deal with the log. Yet Jesus insists that the way to real clarity begins not with scrutinizing the other person, but with honest self-examination. Only when the heart is being cleansed can the eyes begin to see properly.

That cleansing is not meant to lead us into self-absorption or shame. Jesus is not asking us to stare endlessly at our own flaws. He is inviting us into humility. Humility does not deny that others have faults. Specks do exist. People can be wrong, difficult, careless, and hurtful. But humility recognizes that I am not a flawless observer. I am a person in need of grace, just as the other person is. And when that awareness takes root, judgment begins to soften into compassion. Instead of assuming the worst, we become more curious. Instead of reacting immediately, we pause. Instead of speaking from irritation, we seek understanding.

There is also something deeply freeing in this. When we stop making criticism our default posture, we make room for grace to transform us. We begin to ask better questions. What in me is contributing to the harshness of my reaction? Am I tired? Am I carrying resentment? Have I been neglecting prayer and living out of my own thin reserves? Is this person really being malicious, or am I interpreting their actions through my own stress? Those questions do not excuse harmful behavior, but they do help us respond more truthfully. They help us clean the window.

That practice matters in the ordinary places of daily life. It matters in traffic, where another driver's mistake can quickly provoke contempt. It matters at home, where familiarity can make us impatient with the people we love most. It matters at church, where even faithful people can disappoint one another. It matters at work, where unspoken assumptions can poison relationships. In all these places, the call of Jesus is the same: before you try to fix another person's speck, tend first to the condition of your own sight.

One practical way to live this out is to notice the next moment you feel a surge of criticism rising in you. Before saying anything, stop. Take a breath. Ask yourself, "What might be clouding my vision right now?" Perhaps you are more exhausted than you realized. Perhaps you are carrying irritation from something unrelated. Perhaps you are reacting not to this person alone, but to a buildup of pressure in your own life. Then, instead of feeding the judgment, offer a prayer. Pray for the person you are tempted to criticize. Ask God to bless them, to help them, and to help you see them more truthfully. It is difficult to remain harsh toward someone when you are sincerely praying for their good.

Another holy practice is to deliberately assume the best before concluding the worst. That does not mean becoming naive or ignoring real patterns of harm. It means allowing room for mercy in your interpretation. The person who seems abrupt may be grieving. The one who appears distracted may be overwhelmed. The family member who sounds short may be carrying more than you know. Grace does not erase discernment, but it tempers it with tenderness.

Our spiritual vision is precious, and it requires care. When judgment, negativity, and resentment accumulate, they cloud our ability to see the beauty and dignity of the people God has placed around us. But when we allow God to clean the windows of our hearts, something changes. We begin to see others not simply through the lens of irritation or suspicion, but through the gentler, clearer lens of mercy. And in learning to see others with compassion, we also come to understand more deeply how God sees us—with truth, yes, but always with patience, grace, and love.

Prayer

Gracious and All-Seeing God, we confess that our vision is often clouded by pride, impatience, and our own hidden struggles. Forgive us for the times we have been quick to point out the faults of others while ignoring the work needed in our own hearts. Wash the windows of our souls today, Lord, that we might look upon our neighbors not with eyes of judgment, but with the clarity of Your love and grace. *Amen*.

Section III

Persevering Through the Wilderness

The wilderness is not only a place of testing. It is also a place of formation. Here we meet fatigue, temptation, uncertainty, and delay—but we also meet the God who sustains. These devotions are for the long road, for the soul that is tired but still moving forward, for the believer learning to endure with courage. In the wilderness, God often teaches us how to continue when quitting feels easier.

Devotion 21

When You Want to Call It Quits

Scripture

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." — Galatians 6:9, NRSVCE

Reflection

Have you ever wanted to call it quits? Most of us do not have to think very long before answering yes. There are seasons in life when giving up feels not only tempting, but almost reasonable. The weight of expectation grows heavy. Other people's opinions settle on our shoulders. Our own self-doubt begins whispering louder than hope. We keep trying, keep praying, keep working, and yet the results seem painfully small. In moments like that, Paul's words in Galatians speak with quiet strength: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." It is a promise for tired people. It does not deny weariness, but it does challenge despair. It reminds us that perseverance, even when it feels unnoticed, is not wasted in the hands of God.

There is a well-known story about Thomas Edison that captures something of this stubborn refusal to quit. After countless failed attempts in his work to develop the electric light, a reporter reportedly asked him how it felt to fail so many times. Edison answered that he had not failed; he had simply found many ways that did not work. Whatever the exact number, the spirit of the story rings true. He understood that progress often hides inside repeated disappointment. The world later celebrated the finished invention, but few admire the long and weary road of attempts, corrections, frustrations, and near-surrenders that came before it. What eventually brought light to others required a long season of perseverance in the dark.

That pattern is familiar far beyond inventors and laboratories. Many people know what it is to keep going while seeing very little visible fruit. Perhaps you have prayed over the same burden for months or years and nothing seems to change. Perhaps you have poured yourself into family life, ministry, caregiving, or work, only to feel unseen, unappreciated, and emotionally worn thin. Perhaps you have tried to be faithful, kind, and diligent, only to wonder whether any of it matters. There are days when the soul grows tired of carrying hope. There are days when doing the next right thing feels almost too costly.

That is precisely why Paul's words matter. He does not say that the faithful never become weary. He says, in effect, do not let weariness decide your direction. Weariness is real, but it is not a reliable guide. The temptation when we are exhausted is to interpret the delay as failure. We assume that because the harvest has not appeared yet, the planting must have been in vain. But God's economy is different from ours. We live in a culture that wants immediate results, visible outcomes, and quick reassurance. God often works more slowly than our impatience prefers. Seeds do not break open overnight. Roots deepen long before fruit appears. A field can look empty while life is quietly developing beneath the surface.

This is one of the hardest lessons of faith: due time is not the same as our preferred time. We want answers quickly, healing immediately, and affirmation now. But much of Christian

perseverance is learning to trust God in the gap between obedience and visible reward. It is continuing to pray before the answer comes, continuing to serve before the thanks are spoken, continuing to love before the relationship is healed, and continuing to hope before the circumstances improve. That kind of faithfulness often feels invisible. Yet God sees what others miss. He sees every hidden act of obedience, every tired prayer, every quiet refusal to give in to cynicism, every day you simply got up and kept going.

Sometimes what makes us want to quit is not one dramatic crisis, but the accumulation of many small discouragements. It is the unanswered text, the harsh comment, the financial pressure, the ministry fatigue, the strained relationship, the sense that what we are giving is not being returned. In those moments, quitting can masquerade as wisdom. It can sound like self-protection. But not every urge to stop is a sign from God. Sometimes it is simply the voice of exhaustion. That is why perseverance must be joined with dependence. Christian endurance is not gritting our teeth and pretending we are strong enough on our own. It is returning again and again to the God who supplies strength for the next step.

That means one of the holiest things you can do when you feel like quitting is to take your weariness honestly to God. Prayer is not only for polished, victorious moments. It is also for frustration, disappointment, and fatigue. God is not offended by your tiredness. He already sees it. Tell Him the truth. Tell Him that you are discouraged. Tell Him that you feel unseen. Tell Him that you are struggling to believe the harvest will ever come. Honest prayer is not weakness; it is dependence. And dependence is one of the ways God keeps us from collapsing inward on ourselves.

It also helps to let others hold hope with you. Weariness thrives in isolation. When Elijah wanted to give up, God did not merely rebuke him; He cared for him and reminded him that he was not alone. The same is true for us. Fellow believers, faithful friends, and wise companions can sometimes see what we cannot see from within our own discouragement. They remind us of God's faithfulness when our memory grows dim. They steady us when our own resolve wavers. Perseverance is often personal, but it was never meant to be solitary.

And then there is the simple grace of taking one step at a time. We often become overwhelmed because we think we must solve everything at once or see the entire road ahead before moving forward. But God usually gives light enough for the next step, not the whole journey. You may not know what six months from now will look like. You may not know how the harvest will come. But perhaps you can pray today, love today, rest today, forgive today, work today, and trust God with tomorrow. Faithfulness is often built not by grand gestures, but by the repeated offering of the next small yes.

That is why rest matters too. Perseverance is not the same as nonstop striving. Even Jesus withdrew to pray and rest. Weariness does not always mean you are failing; sometimes it means you are human. There are moments when the most faithful thing you can do is to stop, breathe, and receive renewal rather than trying to force yourself onward by sheer will. Rest is not giving up. Sometimes it is how God keeps you from giving up.

Life will have seasons where quitting seems like the most sensible option. But the God who calls you is faithful. He does not abandon His children, and He is never idle, even when His work is hidden from your sight. The field may still look bare. The prayer may still seem unanswered. The

fruit may not yet be visible. But the promise remains: in due time, there will be a harvest. So keep going. Keep trusting. Keep doing the good that God has placed in front of you. The One who planted the promise is also the One who will bring it to completion.

Prayer

Lord, You know the weight on my heart. You see the struggles that make me want to quit. Strengthen me in my weakness, remind me of Your promises, and help me to keep pressing forward. I trust that in due time, I will see the fruits of Your goodness. Thank You for walking with me, even in the hardest moments. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 22

Standing Strong in Life's Storms

Scripture

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock." — Matthew 7:24-25, NRSVCE

Reflection

Life's storms come in many forms. Sometimes they arrive as illness, accident, betrayal, financial strain, or personal loss. Sometimes they rise more quietly through exhaustion, disappointment, family tension, or the slow erosion of hope. However they come, storms have a way of exposing what ordinary days can conceal. They do not ask whether a person is righteous or unrighteous, careful or careless, admired or overlooked. Storms simply come. And when they do, the crucial question is not whether we ever expected them, but what our lives have been built upon when they arrive. Jesus makes this plain in the Gospel of Matthew. The one who hears His words and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who sets a house on rock. Rain falls, floods rise, winds beat against that house, but it stands, because its foundation is secure.

History offers haunting examples of what happens when a structure appears strong on the outside but is compromised underneath. One of the most sobering is the collapse of the St. Francis Dam in California in 1928. To those who looked at it, the dam seemed solid and impressive, a triumph of modern engineering meant to hold back immense pressure. Yet hidden weaknesses in its foundation had gone uncorrected. When those flaws finally gave way, disaster followed with devastating force. A wall of water surged through the valley, destroying lives and communities in its path. The catastrophe was not caused merely by one sudden event out of nowhere. It was made possible by weaknesses beneath the surface—problems that had been ignored until the moment when pressure exposed them.

Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders speaks to that same reality on the spiritual level. A house built on sand may look fine for a while. On clear days, it can appear no different from a house built on rock. The difference becomes clear only when the storm comes. Sand cannot bear sustained pressure. It shifts, gives way, and fails under strain. Rock endures because it is solid beneath the visible structure. That is the point Jesus presses into our hearts. The issue is not simply outward appearance. It is what lies underneath. What supports us when life becomes violent, confusing, unfair, or painfully uncertain? What holds when prayers seem unanswered, when the diagnosis is serious, when trust is broken, or when a future we thought secure suddenly feels fragile?

Many people spend years trying to manage life's pressures the way a dam tries to hold back rising waters. We push ourselves, organize carefully, build reputations, maintain routines, and try to keep everything in place. Some of that is wise and necessary. Yet without a deep spiritual foundation, pressure can eventually reveal how fragile our inner structure has become. A person may appear composed for a long time, yet inwardly be living on anxiety, self-reliance, resentment, unhealed wounds, or a faith that has never moved much beyond surface familiarity.

When the storm arrives, superficial faith often collapses, not because God has failed, but because the life being tested was never rooted deeply enough in Him.

That is why Jesus does not simply praise those who hear His words. He praises those who hear and do them. The strong foundation is not mere religious information. It is a life shaped by trust, obedience, and continued surrender to Christ. A house is not strengthened because the builder admired the blueprint. It is strengthened because the builder followed it. In the same way, a Christian life is not made resilient simply by knowing verses, attending services, or having spiritual opinions. Those things matter, but the rock is found in actually building life upon Christ—in turning to His Word for truth, depending on Him in prayer, obeying Him in daily decisions, and allowing His teachings to shape character over time.

That kind of foundation is rarely built in dramatic moments alone. More often, it is formed through quiet habits of faithfulness. It is built when a person returns to Scripture not only in crisis, but in ordinary days, allowing God's truth to become familiar enough that it is there when needed most. It is built through prayer, not only as an emergency measure, but as a daily communion with the One who gives wisdom, peace, and strength. Prayer does not remove every storm, but it fastens the soul to God in the middle of them. A strong foundation is also built through community. No building stands well in complete isolation, and neither do believers. The encouragement, correction, and care of a faithful church family or circle of godly companions help reinforce what private strength alone cannot sustain.

Integrity and obedience matter here too. They are not burdens added to faith; they are part of what makes a life durable. Every small act of obedience sets another stone in place. Every time we choose truth over convenience, patience over bitterness, prayer over panic, forgiveness over revenge, and trust over control, something in us is being strengthened. We may not see the full effect immediately, just as a builder does not finish a foundation in one hour. But over time, obedience creates spiritual stability. Then when the storm comes, the soul is not trying to improvise strength it has never practiced.

This does not mean that those who build on Christ never tremble. Even a house on rock still feels the force of wind and rain. Christians are not promised immunity from sorrow, fear, grief, or shock. Storms can still hurt. They can still leave us weeping, weary, and searching for breath. But there is a difference between being shaken and being destroyed. A life built on Christ may bend under pressure, but it does not lose its ground. Beneath the pain remains a deeper stability: God is still God, Christ is still Lord, His promises still hold, and His presence has not been washed away by the flood.

And there is more. Those who stand in the storm can become shelter for others. A life grounded in Christ does not endure merely for its own sake. It becomes a place of strength, wisdom, and compassion for those whose foundations are failing around them. The person who has learned to lean on God in suffering is often the one able to offer calm, prayer, and hope when someone else is overwhelmed. In that way, a storm-tested faith becomes a gift.

No one is exempt from life's disasters. The question is never whether storms will come, but what kind of foundation will be revealed when they do. The St. Francis Dam fell because hidden weaknesses could not bear the pressure placed upon them. Jesus warns us so that our lives need not meet the same fate. He invites us to build on something deeper than emotion, success,

appearances, or human strength. He invites us to build on Him. And when we do, the rains may fall, the floods may rise, and the winds may beat hard against us, but we will not be swept away. We will remain standing on the solid rock of Christ, held by the One who is stronger than every storm.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, life brings storms that shake us to our core. Help me to build my life on the firm foundation of Your Word. Strengthen my faith so that I may stand when trials come. Give me wisdom to make choices that honor You and courage to help others in their time of need. No matter how fierce the storm, let me find safety in You. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 23

The Sacred Orbit: Finding Grace in the Return

Scripture

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." — Galatians 6:9, NRSVCE

Reflection

Lent is rarely a season of fireworks. It begins with the visible mark of ashes, with solemn words and a heightened awareness that we are entering sacred ground. But after that first day, the season often settles into the background of ordinary life. The dramatic moment passes, and what remains is the daily work of faith. Many of us enter Lent hoping for sudden breakthrough, a strong surge of spiritual energy, or some obvious sign that transformation is taking place. Yet the spiritual life is often less about one explosive leap and more about the discipline of staying the course. It is less like a lightning strike and more like a long orbit—steady, repeated, and sustained by a center stronger than ourselves.

A fitting image for this kind of faithfulness can be found in the story of John Glenn's historic mission aboard Friendship 7. The launch was dramatic, full of fire, speed, and spectacle. But the deeper triumph of that mission was not simply that he left the ground. It was that he entered orbit and returned again and again, circling the Earth three times over nearly five hours. The mission was not one burst of energy and then an end. It was an act of sustained, careful endurance. Glenn remained held in the gravitational pull of the world beneath him, tracing a path that was both dynamic and disciplined. What made the mission extraordinary was not only the dramatic lift-off, but the continuing return—the steady maintenance of trajectory that allowed the journey to accomplish its purpose.

That image speaks powerfully to the life of faith. We often think the important thing is to "launch" spiritually—to begin well, to feel inspired, to make a commitment with enthusiasm. And beginnings do matter. But spiritual maturity is formed less by how dramatically we start and more by how steadily we return. We are called not just to have moments of faith, but to practice what might be called orbiting faithfulness: returning again and again to the center of God's love, to prayer, to repentance, to quiet obedience, and to the daily habits that keep our lives in His gravity.

There is a real temptation to crave spectacle in our relationship with God. We want mountaintop experiences, immediate answers to prayer, sudden clarity, or visible transformation that we can point to and celebrate. We often assume that if something is holy, it should also be dramatic. But the deepest work of God is often quiet, repetitive, and hidden from public view. Real faithfulness frequently looks less like a grand breakthrough and more like covering familiar ground with patient love. It looks like praying again when yesterday's prayer seemed unanswered. It looks like returning to Scripture even when the heart feels dull. It looks like choosing patience in the same frustrating situation for the tenth time. It looks like showing up, again and again, in the places where love asks us to stay.

A simple comparison from ordinary life helps make this clearer. Think of the physical rehabilitation of an injured athlete or a person recovering from surgery. The work of healing is rarely dramatic. It often consists of small, repetitive movements: rotating an ankle, stretching a resistance band, learning to bear weight again, taking one tentative step, and then another. To an outsider, such work can look unimpressive, even boring. There is no applause in a physical therapy room. There is only effort, discomfort, repetition, and patience. Yet it is precisely this repetitive work that restores strength, rebuilds mobility, and makes healing possible. What appears insignificant is, over time, transformative.

Lent is something like spiritual rehabilitation. It calls us not to one dramatic performance, but to the repeated exercises of grace. It is the orbit of restraint: holding back the sharp word when we are tired and tempted to lash out. It is the orbit of prayer: turning again toward God in the morning even when our minds are scattered or distracted. It is the orbit of service: washing the dishes, sending the encouraging message, listening with patience, or doing the unnoticed task because love often takes the shape of repetition. None of these things seem spectacular. Yet over time they shape the soul. They keep us close to the center. They prevent us from drifting away into self-will, resentment, indifference, or spiritual numbness.

This is one of the hidden truths of discipleship: repeated acts of small faithfulness are never wasted. They are doing more than we can see in the moment. Just as John Glenn's steady orbit helped change the trajectory of history, so the small, repeated acts of trust in a believer's life reshape the inner world. They build endurance. They deepen love. They train the heart to remain within the pull of God's grace. They prepare us for harvests we cannot yet imagine. We may not feel especially holy when we whisper another tired prayer, extend another act of patience, or choose another quiet obedience. But heaven does not measure faithfulness by spectacle. God sees what is done in secret, and He forms souls through what is done consistently.

This means we do not need to despise the ordinary. The repeated and the hidden may be precisely where the Spirit is working most deeply. A person checking a phone several times a day may choose to whisper a short prayer each time instead. Someone in a difficult relationship may practice listening once more without interrupting. A weary soul may decide to do one unnoticed act of kindness without needing anyone to see or thank them. These are not small because they lack importance; they are small because they are close enough to daily life that we can actually practice them. And when practiced repeatedly, they become part of the orbit that keeps us near the heart of God.

There is also comfort here for those who feel discouraged by how unremarkable their faithfulness seems. You may not feel like an astronaut tracing great arcs through the heavens. You may feel more like someone simply trying not to drift, trying not to give up, trying to keep returning to prayer, kindness, honesty, and hope. But that returning is itself holy. The orbit matters. God does not work only through thunderclaps and sudden turns. He works deeply through steady perseverance. The most important turning points in the spiritual life often happen not when everyone is watching, but when no one sees us choose, once again, to trust God with the next step.

So Lent asks us not to chase fireworks, but to embrace faithful return. It trains us to value the small practices that keep us in the gravity of grace. It reminds us that holiness is often formed through repetition, through the thousandth choice to love, to pray, to surrender, and to keep going. Let your faithfulness be an orbit—steady, returning, and held by the God whose love is strong enough to keep drawing you back. In that quiet, repeated turning, the soul is being reshaped, even now.

Prayer

Gracious God, we confess that we often grow weary of the small things. We crave the spectacular and the immediate, forgetting that You are present in the steady and the slow. Grant us the grace today to practice "orbiting faithfulness." When we feel like we are just going in circles, remind us that we are actually circling You—the center of our life and hope. Give us eyes to notice the small buds of new life forming in our hearts and the courage to continue doing good, knowing that in Your time, the harvest will come. *Amen*.

Devotion 24

The Courage of the Long Road

Scripture

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." — Revelation 2:10, NRSVCE

Reflection

By the time Lent reaches its middle stretch, much of the solemn sharpness of Ash Wednesday has usually faded. The ashes are gone, the first surge of spiritual seriousness has settled, and what remains is the quieter, often harder reality of the season itself. We find ourselves in the middle of the fast, the middle of winter, the middle of promises we hoped would renew us. The novelty wears off, and we are left with the wilderness. It is often in this middle place that Scripture gives us companions like Elijah under the broom tree, weary enough to tell God, "It is enough," or the psalmist in Psalm 32, honest enough to confess that hiding pain and sin only wastes away the bones. These are not dramatic beginnings or triumphant endings. They are the truthful, weary middle. And it is precisely there that the witness of faithful endurance becomes so important.

One of the church's great examples of that kind of endurance is Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. He is remembered not because he lived an easy life or because he possessed some kind of superhuman strength, but because he remained faithful over a long lifetime. When many people imagine endurance, they think of sudden heroism, one dramatic decision under pressure. But Polycarp's life reminds us that the deepest kind of steadfastness is usually much quieter than that. It is not flashy. It is formed slowly, year after year, as a heart is softened by grace and shaped by repeated obedience. When Polycarp was arrested for his faith, he was an old man. The authorities did not necessarily want a dramatic execution; they wanted a simple compromise. Just a small gesture. Just a little pinch of incense. Just a few words to Caesar. It was presented almost like a technicality, a tiny concession that would let him go back to safety.

But Polycarp refused. His refusal was not stubborn pride. It grew out of relationship. His famous reply has endured through the centuries because it sounds less like defiance and more like love: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" That answer did not appear in him by accident at the final moment. It had been formed over eighty-six years of ordinary faithfulness—years of waking, praying, serving, worshiping, repenting, and choosing Christ in the countless small moments that make up a human life. His martyrdom was only the final "yes" in a life already shaped by thousands of smaller yeses.

That is why Polycarp's story matters in the wilderness of Lent. Most of us are not standing before Roman officials or facing the demand to renounce Christ publicly. The wilderness we face is more ordinary, but no less real. It shows up in fatigue, in irritation, in discouragement, and in the quiet temptation to cut corners because we are tired. It is the temptation to tell a small lie because honesty feels inconvenient, to nurture resentment because forgiveness feels too expensive, or to retreat into numbness because engagement requires more than we feel able to

give. The middle of Lent often reveals not dramatic temptations, but the daily ones—the ones that come dressed as practicality, frustration, or self-protection.

Consider something as ordinary as being on hold with customer service. You have already waited far too long. The music loops endlessly. Your to-do list is growing. When the representative finally answers, they may be confused, unhelpful, or slow to understand. In that split second, you stand in a wilderness of your own. The temptation is to use words as weapons, to demean, to snap, to release your frustration onto someone who feels safe to blame. It may even feel justified. But the Lenten invitation in that moment is different. It asks you to remember that the voice on the other end belongs to a person made in the image of God. To choose patience there, to swallow the sharp reply and speak with dignity, is not a small thing. It is a kind of dying to self. It is a confession that your irritation is not the center of the universe and that another person's humanity matters as much as your inconvenience.

Or perhaps the challenge is not anger, but absence. Maybe you have promised to be more present in a relationship, but you are tired. The temptation is to withdraw, to scroll through your phone, to offer only the bare minimum of attention. Faithfulness in that moment may look like putting the phone down and listening. It may look like staying in the conversation when you would rather disappear into distraction. It may feel unimpressive, but this too is part of the long obedience. This too is how endurance is built—not by grand displays, but by quiet acts of presence when escape would be easier.

This is where the good news of Christ becomes essential. Hebrews reminds us that because Jesus Himself suffered when He was tested, He is able to help those who are being tested. He knows what it is to be weary. He knows the long road, the pull of suffering, the ache of being pressed. The Christian life is not a demand to manufacture heroic strength out of thin air. It is an invitation to rely on the One who has walked the wilderness before us and now meets us within it. Elijah was not fed by his own determination; he was sustained by bread from heaven. The psalmist was not healed by better self-management; he was relieved by confession. Polycarp was not carried by iron willpower alone; he was steadied by love for the King who had been faithful to him across a lifetime.

So the challenge is not to become a hero by tonight. It is simply to be faithful today. You do not need strength for the next ten years all at once. You need grace for the next ten minutes. That is often how God gives it. Steadfastness is built through repetition. It grows one choice at a time. One moment of resisting the easy way out. One act of honesty when deception feels more convenient. One prayer whispered in weariness. One decision to speak kindly instead of sharply. One confession honestly brought into the light instead of hidden away.

If there is a moment today when you are tempted toward the shortcut—an emotional shortcut, an ethical shortcut, or a relational shortcut—pause long enough to tell the truth before God. "Lord, I want to be selfish right now." That kind of confession is not defeat. It is the doorway to help. Then choose the next faithful step, even if no one sees it. If you are carrying a hidden burden or a secret failure, let Psalm 32 accompany you. There is no need to hide in the wilderness. God is already there.

Lent is not a performance review where we try to impress God with our stamina. It is a season of return. We return to the truth that we are dust, yet dust loved by God. We return to the reality

that faithfulness is not measured by how dramatic we appear, but by whether we keep turning back to Christ. Polycarp did not stand firm because he was unbreakable. He stood because he knew he belonged to a King who had never failed him. And if the long road feels heavy today, you are not walking it alone. Christ has walked it before you, and He walks it beside you now. The crown of life is not reserved for those who never struggle. It is given to those who, when they stumble, keep getting up and keep turning toward the light.

Prayer

Gracious and sustaining God, we thank You for the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, and especially today for the memory of Your servant Polycarp. When we feel the weariness of the wilderness and the temptation to give up, remind us of his eighty-six years of faithfulness. We confess that we often fear discomfort more than we fear losing our closeness to You.

Grant us the courage to be faithful in the ordinary moments of this day. When we are tired, be our strength. When we are frustrated, be our patience. When we have failed, be our mercy. Help us to see that every small choice for truth and kindness is a step toward Your Kingdom. Give us the grace to serve You, not out of fear, but out of love for the One who has never failed us.

In the name of Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, we pray. *Amen*.

Devotion 25

March Forth: Stepping Out Before the Waters Part

Scripture

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.'"
— Exodus 14:15, NRSVCE

Reflection

Look closely at the date on the calendar. March 4 carries a small, almost playful surprise: it sounds like a command—**March forth.** That simple turn of language opens a doorway into something spiritually serious. It sounds like a summons to movement, courage, and transition. It speaks to the many times in life when we know we cannot stay where we are, yet feel uncertain about taking the next step. The spiritual life often contains moments like that. We stand still, waiting for perfect conditions, unmistakable confirmation, or a fully visible path before we dare to move. Yet the witness of Scripture, especially in Exodus 14, shows again and again that God often calls His people forward precisely when the way ahead is not yet visible. Faith is not usually given a complete map. More often, it is asked to take a step while the waters still seem closed.

The Israelites knew what it was to be trapped between fear and uncertainty. When they came to the edge of the Red Sea, they were no longer in Egypt, but they were not yet free in the full sense either. Behind them came the dust and thunder of Pharaoh's army. Before them stretched the impossible barrier of the sea. They were caught between what had been and what could not yet be seen. It is one of the most human moments in Scripture. They panicked. They cried out. They wanted deliverance to appear in a visible, immediate form before they made any move at all. It is hard to blame them. Most of us would have responded the same way. We want God to show us the bridge before we leave the shore. We want the sea parted before we commit our feet to the path.

But God's instruction to Moses is startling in its simplicity: tell the people to go forward. In other words, move first. The command comes before the full visible miracle. The people are not invited to sit safely in the sand until every uncertainty has been removed. They are told to march forth. The story teaches a difficult but liberating truth: the path is often revealed in motion. God's deliverance does not always come in the form of a neatly arranged explanation ahead of time. Sometimes it comes as grace given in the act of obedience itself.

That pattern is familiar in ordinary life, though it rarely feels dramatic while we are living it. Think of what it is like to drive through a dense morning fog. When you are behind the wheel and surrounded by gray mist, you cannot see the destination. Often you cannot see very far at all. Your headlights stretch only a short distance ahead, enough to show the next section of road but not the entire journey. Yet you do not stop the car in the middle of the road and wait for perfect clarity to arrive. You move forward carefully, trusting that as you continue, the next stretch will become visible. You are not given sight for the whole trip at once. You are given enough light for the next part of the road.

That is often how God leads. We want long-range certainty, but He usually offers next-step faithfulness. We want to know the whole story before we agree to the first chapter. We want guarantees about the outcome before we risk obedience. But much of discipleship is learning to trust the God who sees farther than we do. The invitation is usually intimate and immediate rather than exhaustive. Apply for the position. Make the phone call. Start the conversation. Take the class. Say the apology. Offer the forgiveness. Begin the ministry. Step into the responsibility. Open the door. The heart often says, "Lord, show me the whole way," while God gently answers, "Take the next step."

This can feel deeply uncomfortable because uncertainty exposes how much we love control. We imagine that if we could just see a little farther, we would be peaceful. But often peace does not come from seeing farther. It comes from trusting more deeply. The Israelites did not need a detailed engineering report about the Red Sea. They needed the presence of God and the courage to move when He said move. In the same way, we do not always need more information as much as we need more trust. The question is rarely whether God can make a way. The question is whether we are willing to walk when the way begins to open only in front of our obedience.

That does not mean faith is reckless. Marching forth does not mean pretending danger is not real or charging ahead without prayer, wisdom, or discernment. It means refusing to let fear become our master. It means recognizing that hesitation can become its own form of bondage. Sometimes we remain on the shore not because God has not spoken, but because we are waiting for Him to remove every risk before we agree to follow. Yet spiritual maturity is often built in exactly those places where we bring our willingness to the edge of the impossible and discover that God meets us there.

This can apply in small, quiet ways as much as in major life transitions. Perhaps you are standing at the edge of a difficult conversation that needs to happen, but you keep postponing it because you cannot predict the response. Perhaps you sense that God is nudging you toward a new season of service, but you are waiting to feel more qualified. Perhaps you are carrying a burden that needs to be shared with a trusted friend, but you fear vulnerability. Perhaps you know that one simple act of obedience—however small—would be the faithful next step, yet you keep telling yourself you will move later, once you feel more certain. But what if today's call is simply to march forth? Not to solve your whole life, not to map out the next ten years, but to obey in the next ten minutes.

One helpful way to approach this is to ask three quiet questions. What is the next faithful step in front of me—not the whole road, just the next step? Where am I waiting for total certainty before I am willing to offer obedience? And who might walk beside me as I move into this uncertain place? God often leads through community as well as conviction. The Israelites crossed as a people, not as isolated individuals. Sometimes marching forth means letting others pray with you, encourage you, and help steady your courage.

The good news is that God does not stand safely on the other side shouting instructions from a distance. His presence goes with His people into the unknown. The pillar of cloud and fire was not decoration. It was a sign that God Himself was leading and protecting. The same is true for

believers now. We do not march into uncertainty alone. We step forward accompanied by the God who specializes in making a way where there appears to be none.

So if the sea before you feels wide and the path unclear, take heart. Forward movement in faith rarely looks like a dramatic leap. More often it looks like one quiet, faithful step taken in the dark. The fog may still be thick. The waters may not yet appear parted. But the God who called Israel forward is still the God who meets His people at the shoreline. In time, the dawn comes. In time, the fog lifts. In time, the way becomes clear. But often, the first miracle is simply the courage to move.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, when we stand at the shorelines of our own fears and see no way forward, remind us that You are already in the waters. Grant us the courage to step into the unknown and the trust to believe that You will provide solid ground beneath our feet. Give us wisdom to see the very next step You are illuminating, and calm our anxious hearts with the peace of Your steady presence. Lead us through the fog, guide our transitions, and hold us close as we journey toward the new beginnings You have prepared for us. *Amen*.

May you march forth today—one faithful step at a time.

Devotion 26

Breaking Free from the Shadows

Scripture

"You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance." — Psalm 90:8, NRSVCE

Reflection

It would be comforting if coming to Jesus erased every temptation, silenced every dark inclination, and removed every struggle with sin once and for all. But as long as we live in this fallen world, the battle remains. Sin does not always arrive in dramatic form. Often it comes quietly—through what we consume on our screens, the habits we excuse, the conversations we entertain, the desires we nurture, and the compromises we keep making because they seem small enough to manage. Many people know what it is to wrestle with secret sins, the kinds of struggles we hide from others and sometimes even disguise from ourselves. We may hate what they do to us, yet still find ourselves returning to them. That is part of what makes the struggle so painful: sin can become both our wound and our hiding place.

The deeper problem is not only that sin is wrong. Often, the harder truth is that some part of us still wants it. We want freedom, but we also want what we think sin gives us. That is why the battle can become so exhausting. We say we want victory, yet sometimes we are also clinging to the very thing from which we claim we want release. There is an old story about a man who went to a doctor because of a severe limp. The doctor examined him and offered treatment, but the man hesitated. "I've had this limp for years," he admitted. "I hate it, but I've also learned to live with it. At times it brings me sympathy. At times it excuses me from things I do not want to face. If I am healed, I lose those benefits." The doctor responded gently, "Then you must decide—do you want healing, or do you want to keep your limp?"

That story exposes something uncomfortable but true. Our struggle with sin is not only about moral knowledge. Usually we already know the thing is harmful. The deeper issue is whether we truly want healing more than we want the perceived benefits of keeping the wound. Secret sins often promise something: comfort, relief, control, escape, excitement, numbness, affirmation, revenge, or a sense of power. Even when they leave us ashamed, they can still feel familiar, and familiarity can be strangely comforting. We may hate the consequences of sin while secretly treasuring the false comfort it gives. Until that contradiction is brought into the light, real freedom remains difficult because the heart is divided.

This is why repentance must go deeper than saying, "I know this is wrong." Repentance is not merely agreeing with God's standards in theory. It is coming to the place where we begin to believe that life with Christ is truly better than life with the sin we keep protecting. It is learning to see sin not as a private refuge, but as a chain. It is recognizing that what once looked like comfort has become captivity. Many people remain trapped not because God is unwilling to free them, but because they have not yet become honest about the ways they still bargain with their bondage. We say we want to be healed, but sometimes we want to limp just enough to keep the old patterns alive.

The gospel speaks directly into that conflict. Jesus does not shame wounded people for being wounded, but He does ask searching questions. Again and again in the Gospels, He invites honesty. In effect, He asks, “Do you want to be made well?” That question is not cruel. It is merciful. It cuts through excuses and polite religious language and reaches the real issue. Do I want healing, even if it means surrendering the false benefits of my sin? Do I want freedom, even if freedom requires discomfort, confession, discipline, and the death of certain habits? Do I want Christ more than I want the coping mechanisms that keep me from fully depending on Him?

That kind of honesty is difficult, but it is also hopeful, because sin loses much of its power when it is named truthfully. Darkness thrives on vagueness, secrecy, and rationalization. Sin grows stronger when it is hidden, minimized, or wrapped in language that makes it seem less serious than it is. But once it is brought into the light, something begins to change. The light may feel exposing at first, but it is also the place where healing begins. This is why confession matters so deeply. Confession to God is essential because every sin is, at its core, a rupture in relationship with Him. Yet confession is also often meant to move beyond private admission. Scripture says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” That is not an invitation to humiliation. It is an invitation to freedom.

Sin tells us that secrecy is safety. Grace tells us that secrecy is often the prison. Hidden sin gains its strength from isolation. When a struggle remains locked inside, it can seem enormous, untouchable, and permanent. But when it is spoken aloud to a trusted, godly person, the lie begins to weaken. Accountability is not about being policed. It is about being accompanied. It is about refusing to fight alone. A trusted friend, mentor, pastor, or accountability partner can help hold up the truth when our own will feels thin. They can remind us of grace when shame tries to convince us that failure is our identity. They can ask the hard questions, pray with us, and walk beside us in the slow work of change.

This does not mean freedom is always instant. Sometimes God does deliver dramatically. But often healing comes through a process of repeated surrender. We bring the same struggle into the light again and again. We choose truth again and again. We refuse the small compromises that once seemed harmless. We cut off access points, change habits, reshape routines, and learn to turn toward Christ more quickly when temptation rises. The process can feel humbling because it reminds us how needy we are. But perhaps that is part of the healing too. Sin teaches self-deception. Grace teaches dependence.

So the first step toward victory is not pretending to be stronger than you are. It is becoming honest enough to say, “Lord, part of me still wants this, and I need You to change my heart.” The second step is refusing to keep the struggle hidden. Bring it to God plainly. Then bring it, as wisdom allows, to someone trustworthy who will help you walk in the light. Freedom usually begins there—not in grand declarations, but in truth-telling.

The question is not whether God is willing to forgive, restore, and strengthen you. He already is. The cross settled that. The real question is whether you truly want to be healed more than you want to keep the limp. Sin loses its grip when we stop protecting it, stop hiding it, and stop bargaining with it. The light may feel costly at first, but it is the only place where chains begin to

fall. And the Christ who calls you into the light does not do so to condemn you. He does it to make you free.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You see my heart completely. Nothing is hidden from You. I confess that I have held on to sins in secret, afraid to let them go. Give me the courage to bring my struggles into the light, to seek true freedom in You, and to walk in the victory that Christ has already won. Surround me with people who will encourage and hold me accountable. Let Your light shine in every corner of my soul, that I may walk in truth and righteousness. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 27

Breaking the Cycle: Choosing Christ Today

Scripture

"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." — Revelation 3:20, NRSVCE

Reflection

There is a strange comfort in delay. Human beings are skilled at postponing what matters most, especially when it touches the heart at its deepest level. We get used to the rhythms of ordinary life. We follow the crowd, manage our routines, and reassure ourselves that a better time will come later. We tell ourselves we will change when we feel stronger, when life is less complicated, when our questions are fewer, or when the timing seems more convenient. Yet when it comes to our relationship with Jesus Christ, delay is never as neutral as it pretends to be. Waiting becomes its own kind of decision. We may imagine we are simply postponing, but in reality, every day of hesitation is a day spent standing outside the life to which Christ is calling us. He is not merely one option among many. He is either our Savior and Lord, or He is not.

A simple picture helps bring this into focus. Imagine a man standing on a train platform. A train pulls into the station, and he knows it is bound for the very place he longs to go—a place of peace, hope, and true belonging. In his hand is a ticket. It has already been paid for and freely offered to him. He does not need to earn it. He does not need to prove himself worthy of boarding. He simply needs to step on. Yet he hesitates. He watches other passengers climb aboard, but he remains where he is, held back by uncertainty, habit, and the false comfort of the familiar. As the train begins to pull away, he tells himself, "I will catch the next one."

That image captures the way many people relate to Christ. They sense the invitation. They know, at least somewhere deep down, that the life Jesus offers is the life they truly need. They may even believe that His way is good and that His promises are true. Yet they remain on the platform. Why? Sometimes it is fear. Sometimes it is pride. Sometimes it is the assumption that they must become better people before they can come. Sometimes it is the quiet belief that there will always be another, more convenient moment to decide. But Jesus never said, "Come to me once you have cleaned yourself up." He never said, "Come after you have answered every question, conquered every weakness, and arranged your life into order." He simply said, "Come." His call has always been a call to trust, not a reward for people who have already made themselves presentable.

That is one of the most beautiful and unsettling things about the gospel. Jesus asks for the heart before the person feels fully ready. He calls fishermen while their nets are still in their hands. He calls tax collectors while they are still sitting at their tables. He calls sinners while they are still aware of their sin. His invitation does not wait for perfection, because if it did, no one would ever come. Grace meets people where they are, not where they wish they already were. This means that all the reasons we give for waiting often hide a deeper issue: we want certainty without surrender. We want to remain in control while still keeping the option of Christ open for later. But following Jesus begins where control is finally released.

This is why spiritual indecision is so serious. It is not just a temporary state of careful thought. It can become a habit of soul, a way of standing near the door of grace without ever opening it, a way of hearing Christ knock without ever letting Him in. We may think we are being cautious, when in reality we are simply clinging to the platform because it feels more familiar than the journey. Yet there is no true safety in remaining where we are if Christ is calling us elsewhere. The familiar can become its own prison. The train platform may feel stable, but it is not the destination.

At the same time, the call of Christ is never meant to produce panic. It is meant to produce clarity. Jesus does not manipulate people into the kingdom through fear. He speaks truthfully and lovingly. He invites people into life. He offers forgiveness, new direction, and a future shaped not by self-rule, but by His grace. The question is not whether we feel fully prepared. The question is whether we are willing to trust Him enough to step forward.

A few simple questions can help bring that willingness into focus. Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again? Do you accept that God offers forgiveness as a free gift of grace, not something you must purchase through good behavior? Are you willing to let God reshape the direction of your life, even if that means surrendering your own plans and assumptions? And are you ready to tell Him, openly and honestly, that you want Him to lead you? These are not complicated questions, but they reach to the center of the soul. Christianity is not first about mastering a set of religious routines. It begins with a person—Jesus Christ—and with the decision to entrust yourself to Him.

For some, the greatest obstacle is the feeling of unworthiness. They know too much about their own failures. They feel unprepared, too flawed, too inconsistent, too burdened by past choices. But that is precisely why the invitation is grace. Jesus does not wait for worthy people. He makes people new. For others, the obstacle is not shame but attachment. They do not want to release control over some area of life. They want Christ, but only at a distance that leaves them comfortably in charge. Yet Jesus cannot be received merely as an adviser. He comes as Savior and Lord. To receive Him is to say, “My life is no longer my own in the deepest sense. Lead me.”

The beautiful thing is that this decision, though decisive, is also wonderfully simple. If the heart is ready to say yes, then say yes. Speak to Him plainly. Tell Him that you believe, that you need His forgiveness, and that you want Him to take His rightful place in your life. Prayer need not be polished. Christ is not waiting for eloquence. He is looking for honesty. A willing heart is enough to begin.

Jesus is still the One who stands at the door and knocks. He does not ask for perfection. He asks for welcome. He does not wait for you to become strong enough to save yourself. He calls you while you are still in need of saving. And so the real question is not whether another moment may come later. The real question is what you will do with His invitation now. Will you remain on the platform, telling yourself there will be another train? Or will you trust the One who has already paid the fare and step into the life He is offering? The time for decision is not some distant, improved version of today. The time is now.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I hear You knocking at the door of my heart. I confess that I have delayed and made excuses, but today I choose to open the door. I believe that Jesus Christ died for me and rose again. I accept Your forgiveness and surrender my life to You. Guide me in Your ways and strengthen me to follow You daily. Thank You for Your love, mercy, and grace. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Devotion 28

The Quiet Courage of a Renewed Mind

Scripture

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." — Romans 12:2, NRSVCE

Reflection

As early February unfolds, the days begin to lengthen almost unnoticed. There is still winter chill in the air, and the world may still look bare and dormant, yet the light lingers a little longer each evening. Epiphany often feels like that—less like a sudden blaze and more like a steady, gradual revealing of God's presence. Spiritual growth is often much the same. We tend to look for dramatic breakthroughs, but much of God's work in us happens quietly, like winter light slowly stretching across the day. That is why this season invites us to look inward, not only at our habits and actions, but at the deeper "operating system" of the heart. Paul's words in Romans call us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That is not merely about outward behavior. It is about the inner patterns of thought, reaction, and desire that shape the way we live.

When Christians hear the phrase "do not be conformed to this world," it is easy to imagine dramatic acts of courage and open resistance. History certainly gives us such examples. The Martyrs of Japan, St. Agatha, and countless other saints faced direct pressure to renounce their loyalty to Christ, and they refused. Their witness is holy and unforgettable. They would not fit themselves into the mold demanded by a hostile world. They held fast to their identity in Christ even when the cost was severe. But while such grand moments of faithfulness do exist, most believers are not asked to prove their loyalty in a courtroom or before an executioner. More often, the pressure to conform happens in the ordinary friction of everyday life.

The "pattern of this world" is not always grand or dramatic. Often it is simply the easiest reaction. It is the path of least resistance that tells us to answer irritation with irritation, to protect our pride at all costs, to hoard credit when things go well, or to return coldness for coldness. Conformity happens when we let the surrounding world write our script for us. It happens when we react automatically rather than prayerfully, when we treat impatience as normal, anxiety as inevitable, and self-protection as wisdom. The world's pattern often feels reasonable because it is so common. Yet Paul says that Christians are called to something different, something deeper: a renewed mind, a transformed way of seeing.

That renewal is often tested in situations so ordinary that we are tempted to think they do not matter. Imagine being on hold with customer service because of a frustrating billing error. You have already waited too long. The same looping melody has played again and again, and by the time someone finally answers, your patience is worn thin. The representative sounds tired, perhaps uncertain, perhaps unable to fix the problem quickly. In that moment, the world has a script ready for you. It whispers that your time is the most important thing in the universe, that your frustration gives you the right to speak harshly, and that the person on the other end of the

line is merely an obstacle standing between you and your peace. It all feels justified. It all feels normal.

But the renewed mind interrupts that script. It creates a pause long enough to ask a different question: what is the will of God here? In that small but sacred moment, the Holy Spirit may remind you that the voice on the other end of the line belongs to a person made in the image of God, someone who may be underpaid, overwhelmed, or carrying burdens you cannot see. Suddenly the situation is no longer just about efficiency or getting your way. It becomes a place where transformation can take shape. The choice to answer with patience rather than contempt, with dignity rather than disdain, is not a small thing. It is one more instance of refusing the world's pattern and choosing the mind of Christ instead.

This is where much of Christian formation actually happens. We often imagine discerning God's will only in major life decisions—whom to marry, where to live, what vocation to pursue. But Paul's words in Romans suggest something much more immediate. The renewed mind helps us discern the will of God not only in dramatic crossroads, but in the tone of voice we use, the assumptions we make about others, the way we respond when inconvenienced, and the habits of thought that quietly govern our days. The battlefield of transformation is often not public and heroic. It is internal and ordinary.

That is why the renewing of the mind matters so deeply. We become shaped by what we repeatedly allow into our hearts. If our thoughts are constantly fed by outrage, fear, resentment, or endless noise, we should not be surprised when those things begin to govern our reactions. Minds are not renewed accidentally. They are renewed by what they are exposed to and by what they dwell upon. Just as winter light gradually changes the day, the light of Christ gradually changes the mind that turns toward Him. Scripture, silence, prayer, worship, and conscious attention to the presence of God all become ways of opening the windows of the soul to that light.

One helpful practice is what might be called a "circuit breaker" pause. When you feel irritation rising—in traffic, in a checkout line, in a tense conversation, or while reading a frustrating email—stop for a moment before reacting. Take one full breath. Refuse to let the pressure outside you automatically dictate what happens inside you. In that pause, you make room for another voice to speak. A brief prayer can help: "Lord, renew my mind here." That simple sentence can become an act of surrender in the middle of an ordinary day.

It also helps to pay attention to the stream of input shaping your inner world. If the mind is constantly filled with alarm, anger, and distraction, it will struggle to become a place of peace. Even replacing ten minutes of anxious scrolling with ten minutes of silence, Scripture, or music that turns the heart toward God can begin to reorient the soul. These are not dramatic gestures. They are small acts of cooperation with grace. And over time, small acts repeated faithfully have great power.

Transformation is rarely an overnight event. It is more often a lifelong process of turning our faces again and again toward the light. That should not discourage us. It should steady us. We are not asked to rebuild ourselves by sheer willpower. We are invited to yield our minds to the Holy Spirit, who does the deeper work within us. God is patient in this process. He does not despise slow growth. He is content to work through repeated interruptions, small choices, and

quiet moments of surrender, shaping a person from the inside out into someone marked by peace, patience, and clarity.

So take heart. The light may seem subtle, but it is real. The renewal may feel slow, but it is happening. And as you keep turning toward Christ in the ordinary places of life, you may find that the mind once shaped by the world is gradually becoming a place where His peace can dwell.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for the increasing light of these winter days and the reminder that You are always at work, even in the cold and quiet seasons. I confess that I often let the stress and hurry of this world shape my thoughts and reactions. forgive me for the times I have chosen irritation over grace. I ask for the courage of the saints who have gone before me, to stand firm in Your love. Please wash over my mind today; scrub away the cynicism and fatigue, and replace them with Your wisdom. Help me to see the people around me as You see them, and give me the strength to choose what is good, acceptable, and perfect. *Amen*.

Devotion 29

Untethered: The Courage to Step Into the Open

Scripture

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.'" — Genesis 45:4–7, NRSVCE

Reflection

Perhaps no question is more ancient or more agonizing than this one: **Why?** It hangs in the sterile air of hospital waiting rooms, echoes in the silence of an empty house, and rises from the shock of headlines that make no sense to the human heart. Why did this happen? Why did God allow it? If God is good and powerful, why is there so much pain?

When suffering enters our lives—through grief, betrayal, illness, injustice, or loss—we feel a deep need to solve the riddle of our pain. We long for an answer that can satisfy the mind and steady the heart. Yet if we are honest, many of the explanations people offer in such moments feel thin and hollow. On this side of heaven, the problem of evil does not come with a tidy mathematical solution. We see through a glass darkly. There are mysteries in God's providence we cannot fully untangle. Still, while Scripture does not always answer the question of why in the way we want, it does give us a place to stand when the winds of adversity blow. It gives us the story of Joseph—not to dismiss pain, but to reveal a God who remains at work within it.

Joseph's life is one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible, but we must not rush too quickly to its final triumph. Before Joseph stood in a place of power in Egypt, he passed through years of profound darkness. At seventeen, he was stripped not only of his robe, but of his dignity. Betrayed by his own brothers, he was sold into slavery and carried far from home. In Egypt, though he acted with integrity, he was falsely accused and thrown into prison, forgotten by those he had helped. The prime years of his life were spent in pits, prisons, and waiting rooms of a different kind. Joseph knew what it was to suffer not because he had done evil, but because evil had been done to him.

When he finally stood before his brothers in Genesis 45, Joseph did not pretend the past had not happened. He did not smooth it over with spiritual language. He named the wound plainly: "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt." He acknowledged the betrayal. He told the truth about the evil that had been committed against him. God did not make Joseph's brothers hate him. Their envy and cruelty were their own. This is important, because redemption does not require denial. The pain was real. The injustice was real. The wrong was real.

But then Joseph says something astonishing: "God sent me before you to preserve life." Here the story shifts from the reality of human evil to the greater reality of divine providence. Joseph had come to see that while others intended harm, God had been at work in and through the wreckage, bending what was meant for evil toward a redemptive purpose. God did not cause the

sin, but neither did He surrender Joseph to meaninglessness. Through betrayal, slavery, imprisonment, and long years of obscurity, God positioned Joseph to save many lives in a season of famine. The evil was not good, but it did not get the final word.

That truth becomes an anchor for suffering souls. When the question "Why did this happen?" meets the silence of mystery, faith may begin to ask another question, one that is often more livable: **What can God do with this?** What grace might He bring from this wound? What life might yet be preserved? What work of redemption might still emerge from what was meant for harm? This is not shallow optimism, nor is it an attempt to call evil good. It is resurrection faith. It is the conviction that God can gather the torn threads of suffering and weave them into a tapestry of grace.

A simple image helps make that hope visible. Imagine walking into the studio of a mosaic artist. On the table before you lies what looks like a disaster: broken ceramic plates, jagged pieces of glass, shards of color with sharp and dangerous edges. To the untrained eye, it looks like waste. If you picked up one of the pieces, it might even cut you. Its brokenness is undeniable. If you asked one of those fragments, "Why were you broken?" the answer might be painfully simple: because someone was careless, because something precious fell, because damage happened. But the artist sees more than a heap of fragments. Patiently and deliberately, those jagged pieces are placed into mortar. Over time, a design begins to emerge. The darker shards provide contrast. The sharp edges fit into places where unbroken pieces never could. And when the work is finished, light catches the mosaic and turns what once looked ruined into something breathtakingly beautiful.

So it is with many of the hardest experiences of our lives. Abuse, illness, divorce, grief, betrayal, disappointment, loss—these are not good things. Scripture does not ask us to pretend they are. They are jagged pieces, and they wound us deeply. But we belong to a God who is the Master Artist. He does not discard the broken fragments of our lives. He gathers them. With a patience deeper than we can measure, He begins to build a picture of redemption that we often cannot yet see.

We see this most fully not in Joseph, but in Jesus Christ. The cross was the ultimate act of evil: the sinless Son of God rejected, tortured, and killed by sinful hands. Yet God used that very act to bring salvation to the world. Joseph's suffering preserved a remnant—the family through whom God's covenant promises would continue. That family line would one day lead to Christ. What was among the worst things to happen to Joseph became part of the unfolding mercy of God for humanity. And at Calvary, what looked like absolute defeat became the doorway to resurrection.

If you are walking through a valley of shadows today, hold onto faith without denying reality. Lament honestly before God. He is not threatened by your tears, your anger, or your questions. Refuse the trap of self-blame unless there is true sin that needs repentance. Many sorrows come simply because we live in a broken world that is not yet fully healed. Look for the remnant—for small signs of grace still alive in the ashes: a friend who called, a moment of peace, a lesson being learned, a strength that did not come from you alone. Stay connected to the body of Christ, because suffering isolates and grace often comes through the presence of others. And when you

cannot trace God's hand, trust His heart. Look to Jesus, who suffered with you and for you, and whose resurrection declares that suffering is never the final word for those who belong to Him.

We may never fully understand the why of our pain in this life. Some mysteries remain too high for us. But we can know the Who. We know the God who was with Joseph in the pit and in the prison. We know the God who entered human suffering in Christ and hung on a cross for us. We know the God who brings life out of death, hope out of ruin, and beauty out of brokenness.

Your story is not over. This chapter may be heavy, perhaps the heaviest you have ever known, but the Author is good. Even now He is at work to preserve, to redeem, and to shape a future hope from what was meant for harm. He is building a remnant. He is making a mosaic. And He is for you.

Prayer

Lord God, I confess that I do not understand why things happen the way they do. My heart is heavy, and the pieces of my life feel scattered and broken. I admit that I am sometimes angry and often afraid. Please help me. I do not ask for all the answers today, but I ask for Your presence. Like Joseph, help me to see Your hand at work even in the darkness. Take the broken pieces of my story and weave them into Your good plan. Keep me from bitterness, and help me to trust that You are redeeming what I cannot repair. Lord, hold on to me when I suffer evil, and keep my trust steadfast in Jesus my Savior. *Amen*.

Devotion 30

A Legacy of Trust: Finishing Well

Scripture

"For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth... Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent."— Psalm 71:5,9, NRSVCE

Reflection

When we are young, life has a way of making us feel almost invincible. In our twenties and thirties, the road ahead seems long, generous, and full of room for correction. If we make a wrong turn, we assume there will be time to adjust the route. The future feels open, flexible, and forgiving. But as the years pass, something shifts. By the time we reach our fifties and beyond, life begins to feel less like a long highway and more like a fast-moving ride already well underway. The curves come more quickly. The descents are steeper. The miles behind us are no longer a small fraction of the journey, but a significant portion of it. Retirement no longer seems far away. The passing of others—parents, siblings, friends, mentors—becomes more personal. We begin to realize, sometimes with a jolt, that our own place in the order of life is moving steadily forward. And with that realization comes a question that presses more deeply than it once did: what kind of legacy will I leave?

Most people instinctively begin to measure that legacy in terms of what they accomplished. We look back at our work, our service, our relationships, our successes, our failures, and the unfinished parts of our story. We count what we built and what we neglected. We wonder how we will be remembered. Yet the Psalmist offers a different way of thinking. The deepest legacy of a life is not finally found in a record of achievements, but in the testimony of trust. It is not first about what we managed to hold together, but about Who held us together when our own strength began to fail. The witness of a life is not just what it did in its strongest years, but how it leaned on God when strength grew thin.

A helpful picture is that of a classic old automobile. In its prime, it was powerful, elegant, and full of motion. It moved down the highway with confidence and strength, carrying people, cargo, and memories through one season after another. But time does what time always does. Eventually, the gears begin to grind. The suspension stiffens. The engine strains more on the hills. The body may still shine if polished carefully, but the wear inside cannot be hidden forever. High mileage leaves its mark.

So it is with us. For many years we move through life relying on our own horsepower. We work, serve, plan, build, provide, and carry responsibilities as though our energy will always answer when called upon. But eventually the body begins to speak a different language. The quiet check-engine light starts to flicker, and after a while it seems determined to stay on. What was once done easily now requires thought, pacing, or help. For some, that reality arrives with back pain that resists our best efforts. For others, it comes through shoulder injuries, worn joints, heart concerns, chronic fatigue, balance issues, or the accumulating aches that remind us daily that the body is not permanent. Old age introduces a new and often unwelcome companion: weakness.

And weakness is difficult precisely because it strips away the illusion of self-sufficiency. It reminds us that we are not machines built to run endlessly. We are creatures—beloved, yes, but limited. This can create a spiritual crossroads. One road leads toward bitterness. Many people understandably drift in that direction. They become increasingly defined by complaint, by frustration over what no longer works, by anger that the body has become unreliable, or by sorrow that independence has narrowed. Pain turns the focus inward, and the inward world can become very small. But there is another road, harder perhaps, but holier. It is the road of surrender. It is the slow acceptance that weakness, however unwelcome, can become a place where deeper trust is born.

That may sound strange at first. We do not usually think of physical decline as the beginning of anything good. Yet Scripture often shows that where human strength ends, a different kind of strength becomes visible. The apostle Paul learned to say, "When I am weak, then I am strong," not because weakness felt pleasant, but because it forced him into a more radical dependence on Christ. There is a kind of spiritual maturing that only weakness can teach. When the body no longer cooperates as it once did, the soul is invited to let go of old assumptions. We may no longer be able to trust ourselves in the same way, but we can trust God more deeply than before. In youth, many people trust Him with their ambition, their hopes, and their plans. In old age, we learn to trust Him with our pain, our frailty, and our slow diminishment. That too is holy.

And perhaps that is one of the greatest legacies a believer can leave. Not a list of conquests, but a witness of reliance. Not merely proof that we were once capable, but evidence that when capability faded, faith did not. There is something profoundly powerful about a life that can say, "I trusted God in the strength of my youth, and I trust Him still in the weakness of old age." Such a testimony speaks more deeply than worldly achievement ever could. It tells children, grandchildren, friends, and fellow believers that Christ is not only for the years of productivity and outward usefulness. He is also for the slow mornings, the aching joints, the diminished energy, the medical appointments, and the days when endurance itself becomes an offering.

That is why physical pain, difficult as it is, can become a kind of bell that calls the heart back to prayer. Instead of allowing every ache to become only a reason for complaint, it can become a reminder of dependence. The next time a back pain flares, a hip protests, a shoulder resists, or simple movement becomes frustrating, that moment can be turned into prayer: "Lord, my body is weak, but You are my strength. Be my Rock here." This does not deny the pain. It sanctifies the moment by refusing to let pain speak the final word. The body says, "You are limited." Faith answers, "Yes, and God is not."

This is not easy. No one should pretend that aging is simple or that chronic pain is noble in itself. Loss is still loss. Grief is still real. There is nothing unspiritual about mourning what the body once could do. But for the Christian, weakness need not become only bitterness. It can become a place of communion. It can become the school in which trust deepens, prayer becomes more immediate, and reliance on Christ becomes less theoretical and more necessary.

Old age and physical decline are not signs that life has failed. They are part of what it means to live a mortal life measured out in days of grace. In the end, your legacy will not be written by how well your joints held up or how long your strength lasted. It will be written by whether your faith kept holding on. The truest inheritance you can leave may be this simple testimony: that

through youth and age, through strength and weakness, through ease and pain, you trusted the Lord until your very last breath.

Prayer

Gracious Father, my Rock and my Fortress, I thank You that You have been my trust from my youth until now. You know the frame of this body; You know the sting of degenerative disks, the ache of worn hips, and the frustration of limited movement. Lord, keep me from the temptation to be bitter. When my body fails me, remind my spirit that You never will. Do not forsake me when my strength is spent. Instead, let my endurance through pain be a testimony to my family and friends that You are enough. May I finish this race trusting You more today than I did when I was strong. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

Section IV

Light Returning

After long seasons of struggle, grace has a way of appearing first as a glimmer, then as a steady light. Restoration often comes quietly—through peace, healing, renewed vision, gentle courage, and the rediscovery of joy. These devotions gather around that returning light. They remind us that God is not only present in hardship; He is also the One who restores, renews, and leads us toward morning.

Devotion 31

Returning in Grace: A Lenten Reflection on Saint Patrick

Scripture

"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."— Genesis 50:20, NRSVCE

Reflection

Reflection

On March 17, the church remembers Saint Patrick, traditionally honoring the day of his death in A.D. 461. While popular culture often fills the day with parades, green decorations, and cheerful celebration, its place within the season of Lent invites a deeper and more searching response. Patrick's legacy is not mainly about cultural symbols or national pride. At its heart, it is a story of penitence, extraordinary forgiveness, and bold obedience to the call of God. In that way, his life stands close to the story of Joseph in Genesis. Both men knew betrayal, exile, and loss. Both endured seasons of deep isolation. And both became witnesses to the mysterious way God can redeem what was meant for harm. Lent teaches us to expect precisely this kind of grace: that God often does some of His deepest work in the dark, and that from places of suffering He can bring forth unexpected light.

Patrick's early life was marked by profound upheaval. At sixteen years of age, he was kidnapped from his home in Britain by raiders and carried across the sea to Ireland, where he was sold into slavery. There, in the harsh loneliness of tending sheep, cut off from home and stripped of freedom, Patrick found himself with little to cling to except God. The faith that may once have seemed familiar or inherited suddenly became urgent and personal. In the wilderness of cold fields and forced labor, prayer became his lifeline. He later wrote of praying constantly, by day and by night, discovering in suffering the nearness of God. After six long years in captivity, he escaped and made the difficult journey home.

That would already be a remarkable story of deliverance. But the deeper miracle of Patrick's life was not simply that he got away. It was that he returned.

Years after his escape, Patrick sensed God calling him back to Ireland—not in revenge, not to settle old wounds, but to preach the gospel to the very people who had enslaved him. That kind of return requires more than ordinary courage. It requires a transformed heart. Anyone who has ever had to step back into a place connected with deep hurt understands this in some measure. It may be a workplace where betrayal took place, a hospital room tied to loss, a family gathering burdened by old pain, or even a conversation with someone whose words once cut deeply. Before entering such places, the heart braces itself. We instinctively cross our arms inwardly, guard our words, and prepare for self-protection. We build walls because we remember what it felt like to be wounded there.

A woman I once heard about had to return to a workplace where she had been deeply betrayed by people she once trusted. She had to finalize her departure and train the very person who would replace her. The evening before, she was overcome with anxiety and anger. She rehearsed

old grievances, imagined every awkward moment, and felt herself hardening. To walk through those doors the next morning required something far deeper than a calm outward face. It required her to lay down the need to defend herself at every turn and to receive a kind of quiet dignity that did not depend on whether others treated her fairly. That is not easy grace. It is costly grace.

Patrick faced something even larger. He did not return to one room of difficult people; he returned to an entire land associated with trauma and captivity. That kind of calling could not be fulfilled in his own strength. It had to be lived inside the strength of Christ. This is where his life echoes the words of Ephesians 6:11: "Put on the whole armor of God." Patrick's armor was not bitterness. It was not emotional numbness. It was not resentment dressed up as caution. The famous prayer associated with him, often called *St. Patrick's Breastplate*, shows the true nature of his protection. Again and again it invokes the presence of Christ: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me." Patrick did not clothe himself in suspicion. He clothed himself in Christ.

That is what made forgiveness possible. Forgiveness, in the Christian sense, is not pretending the wound never happened. Patrick did not deny his captivity or romanticize his pain. Forgiveness is not forgetfulness, and it is certainly not approval of evil. It is the refusal to let past harm rule the future. It is the decision, made possible by grace, that the wound will not become the final authority over the soul. Patrick was able to return because he had become anchored in a greater reality than his own history. Surrounded by Christ, he was safe enough not to live from resentment. Held by Christ, he was free enough to become a missionary instead of a prisoner of the past.

This is one of Lent's deepest invitations. Lent is a season of return. We return to prayer, to confession, to honesty before God. But sometimes we are also invited to return inwardly to places of pain—not in order to relive them endlessly, but to let Christ enter them more fully. There may be a memory, a relationship, or a wounded part of your past that you have sealed off because it still feels dangerous. Wisdom does not require you to place yourself back into harm's way. Boundaries can be holy. But even where physical return is not wise, spiritual return may still be necessary. That return begins when we stop shielding ourselves with resentment and begin asking Christ to stand around us.

One helpful practice is simply to pray in the spirit of Patrick's Breastplate when old bitterness or fear rises. You do not need ornate language. You can pray quietly and simply: "Christ before me. Christ behind me. Christ within me. Christ around me." That prayer is not magic. It is an act of trust. It reminds the heart that protection does not come from hardness alone. It comes from the presence of the living Christ. And when His presence becomes more real to us than our wound, something begins to soften. Not all at once, not cheaply, but truly.

Patrick's life also reminds us that the places of deepest hurt can, in God's hands, become places of surprising fruitfulness. Just as Joseph could say that what others meant for evil, God used for good, so Patrick's captivity became part of the mystery through which Ireland would later hear the gospel. This does not mean evil was good. It means evil did not win. That is a crucial difference. God does not bless betrayal itself, but He can redeem what betrayal tried to destroy.

Saint Patrick's witness offers a profound Lenten lesson: true strength is found not in hardened self-protection, but in the protective presence of Christ. When we are clothed in Him, we can face the ghosts of the past with honesty, courage, and grace. We can acknowledge the wound without being ruled by it. We can forgive without pretending. And we can trust that the God who met Patrick in the cold wilderness is still able to bring unexpected good from the deepest hurts of our lives.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, who met Saint Patrick in the solitary cold of his captivity and gave him the courage to return to his captors in love, grant us that same transformative grace this Lenten season. When we are tempted to build walls of bitterness, help us instead to put on the whole armor of your presence. May we walk through this day knowing that You are with us, before us, behind us, and within us, shielding our hearts and guiding our steps toward forgiveness and peace. *Amen*.

Devotion 32

Restored to Full Stature: Dignity, Justice, and the Lenten Journey

Scripture

"Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing."— Luke 13:10–17, NRSVCE

Reflection

By the Third Sunday in Lent, the journey often feels different than it did at the beginning. The solemn intensity of Ash Wednesday has usually softened, and the first burst of resolve may have given way to something quieter and harder. We find ourselves in the middle stretch—the place where enthusiasm fades and endurance begins. Lent often leads us here on purpose. It brings us into the desert of our own hearts, where distractions thin out and deeper truths begin to surface. It is in this wilderness, not usually in dramatic moments, that much of the Spirit's most searching work takes place.

This point in the season also invites us to consider the dignity, strength, and God-given worth of women. To do that is not a distraction from Christian devotion, but an expression of it. To honor women rightly is to honor the image of God in those whom God created, called, strengthened, and loved. Scripture is filled with the witness of women whose faith, wisdom, courage, and endurance have shaped the people of God, even when their voices were overlooked by the world around them. And in the ministry of Jesus, we see again and again that He not only noticed women, but restored, honored, and defended them in ways that challenged the assumptions of His time.

One of the most moving examples comes in the Gospel scene where Jesus encounters a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. She is physically burdened, socially diminished, and spiritually overlooked. Her body tells a story of long suffering. Yet Jesus sees her. He stops what He is doing, calls her forward, and heals her. Significantly, He does not merely relieve her pain in private. When criticism arises because He acted on the Sabbath, He publicly defends her and names her with deep covenant dignity: a "daughter of Abraham." That title matters. Jesus restores not only her body, but her place, her worth, and her public honor. He will not allow her to remain hidden beneath the weight that has bent her low.

This is what God does. He raises up those the world has grown used to overlooking. He straightens what has been bent by burden, injustice, neglect, or diminishment. And throughout history, women have so often embodied this quiet strength. Proverbs 31, for example, is sometimes reduced to a narrow list of domestic expectations, but read more fully, it offers something richer: a portrait of a woman clothed in strength and dignity, marked by wisdom, courage, initiative, discernment, and faithful labor. She is not fragile, invisible, or ornamental. She is active, resourceful, and honored. Scripture's vision is far larger than the small roles human culture has sometimes tried to impose.

Yet Lent teaches us that admiration alone is not enough. Celebration without repentance is shallow. It is one thing to praise the dignity of women in principle. It is another to examine the ways we may have failed to honor that dignity in practice. The Lenten path always moves through truth. It asks uncomfortable questions. Have we interrupted women more quickly than we listened to them? Have we benefited from their labor while overlooking their wisdom? Have we been quicker to question than to trust, quicker to explain than to hear, quicker to praise abstract virtues than to support actual justice? These are not questions for condemnation, but for conversion. Repentance is not merely giving up a luxury for forty days. It is allowing God to search the habits of our hearts and reshape them toward love.

This matters because the forces that bend people low are not always dramatic. Often they are subtle and cumulative. A voice ignored in a meeting. A gift treated as secondary. A burden carried silently because others assume it is just her role. A story interrupted. A contribution forgotten. A fear dismissed. The woman in the Gospel had been bent over for eighteen years. Many burdens in this world do not come in one blow; they come through years of being overlooked, misjudged, spoken over, or left unsupported. To follow Christ means learning to notice these things, not with self-righteousness, but with compassion and courage.

Sometimes this Christlike courage appears in ordinary places. Picture an experienced ICU nurse finishing a brutal night shift. She is tired, mentally drained, and already carrying the weight of the patients she has tended. During rounds, she notices that a vulnerable patient—perhaps someone who does not speak English fluently, someone frightened and easily overlooked—is being rushed past too quickly. She speaks up. Not dramatically, not for applause, but with calm, professional conviction. She advocates because she knows that the person in that bed bears the image of God and deserves to be seen and protected. That is a quiet form of justice. It is the kind of ordinary courage by which people are helped to stand a little straighter.

Lent invites us into that kind of action. It asks not only what we are giving up, but what habits of love we are willing to take on. One faithful beginning is simply to practice deeper listening. Make an intentional fast from interrupting. Create space in conversation to hear women fully—in your family, in your church, in your workplace, in your friendships. Listening is not passive. It is one of the ways love honors another person's dignity. Another step is inward examination. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any assumptions, reflexes, or biases that make you slow to recognize women's leadership, insight, or suffering. True repentance is often quieter than public statements. It begins where the heart is willing to be corrected.

It also helps to become more deliberate in affirmation. Publicly and specifically acknowledge the courage, wisdom, labor, or grace of a woman you know. Sometimes one of the holiest things we

can do is help another person stand a little taller by naming the gifts God has given them. And beyond words, support can take practical form. Offer time, resources, or attention to work that strengthens the safety, health, education, and flourishing of vulnerable women and girls. Love becomes more truthful when it takes shape in action.

This is what the Lenten life looks like at its best. It is not merely a season of private austerity. It is a season in which God teaches us to release the habits, assumptions, and systems that diminish the dignity of others. It is a season that trains us to become people of courage, humility, and repair. As we follow Christ toward Jerusalem, we are being formed by the One who saw the bent-over woman, called her forward, and defended her worth before the crowd. To walk with Him means learning to do the same in the ordinary places of our own lives.

So this Lent, let your devotion become visible in the way you honor the image of God in others. Let repentance deepen into listening. Let conviction become encouragement. Let compassion become action. And may Christ, who restores the bowed down and names the overlooked with dignity, teach us to become people whose words and deeds help others rise.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we give You thanks for the faithful women throughout history and in our own lives who have reflected Your wisdom, courage, and enduring love. As we walk this Lenten path, we ask for Your healing and forgiveness in the places where we, or our societies, have caused harm, disregarded voices, or failed to uphold the dignity of Your daughters. Fill us with the courage of Your Spirit so that we might champion rights, justice, and action shaped entirely by Christ's merciful love. We remember today all women and girls who are vulnerable, overlooked, or oppressed, asking that You would lift them up, protect them, and use our hands and voices to help them stand tall. We ask this in the strong and saving name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen*.

Devotion 33

The Quiet Strength of an Open Hand

Scripture

"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." — Romans 12:18, NRSVCE

Reflection

Early March is a season of thresholds. Winter's hard grip begins to loosen, yet the steady warmth of spring has not fully arrived. The days lengthen, the light changes, and now and then the air hints at new life, but cold winds still return without warning. It is a season of in-between spaces—subtle shifts, uncertain weather, and slow transitions. In many ways, human relationships feel much the same. We live among people in these threshold places, navigating conflict, misunderstanding, change, and the daily friction of ordinary life. That is why Paul's words in Romans feel especially fitting: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Peace, in this kind of world, is rarely a finished and settled state. More often, it is an active work of grace carried out in a world that is still thawing.

What is striking in Paul's instruction is its realism. He does not say, "Make sure everyone gets along." He does not place upon us the impossible burden of controlling other people's behavior, healing every breach, or dissolving every conflict. Instead, he draws a faithful boundary around our responsibility: *if it is possible… so far as it depends on you*. That phrase is both humbling and freeing. It reminds us that peacemaking is not the same as appeasement. God does not ask us to maintain a false peace at the cost of truth, dignity, or moral clarity. Nor does He hold us accountable for the choices other people make. What He asks of us is a measured response—truthful, kind, steady, and rooted in humility. Peace, then, is not weakness. It is disciplined strength.

History offers sobering reminders of what happens when such restraint is lost. There are moments when fear, pride, and unchecked power quickly turn tension into devastation. Crowds ignite. Authorities overreach. Rival camps entrench themselves. Words harden into systems, and systems harden into harm. History is full of such warnings, and it also reminds us how fragile human power really is. Empires rise and fall. Leaders come and go. Tragedy can strike without warning, and lives can be changed in a single moment. These reminders are not given to make us cynical, but to make us sober. If life is this fragile and conflict this dangerous, then how we speak, how we listen, and how we carry ourselves in moments of friction matter more than we often realize.

Yet for most of us, the call to peacemaking is not usually tested in the halls of government or on the pages of history books. It is tested in ordinary places: a family conversation that turns tense, a misunderstanding at church, an argument at home, a customer service exchange, a frustrating email, a harsh word in a workplace meeting. Peace is often made or lost in those small, unglamorous moments where ego, weariness, and misunderstanding meet. That is where Paul's words become especially practical.

Imagine a tense moment at work. A coworker, stressed and overwhelmed, snaps at you unfairly in the middle of a meeting. The whole room feels awkward. Your instinct may be to fire back, to defend your dignity, to raise your own voice so you are not trampled. Another impulse might be to shrink back completely, to say nothing, to absorb the mistreatment in the name of keeping things calm. But neither reaction necessarily reflects the peace Paul describes. Living peaceably does not mean validating what is false or pretending that harmful behavior is acceptable. Nor does it mean surrendering your integrity. Instead, it may look like taking a slow breath before speaking. It may look like lowering the volume of your voice when theirs is rising. It may look like saying, "I can see this matters to both of us. Let's slow down and look at the facts together." That kind of response is not passive. It is a form of moral courage. It de-escalates without surrendering the truth.

This is why Christian peacemaking is gritty and realistic. It is not sentimental. It does not deny pain, excuse injustice, or ask us to become spineless in the face of harm. It asks for something more difficult: a spirit that is calm without being cowardly, truthful without being cruel, and courageous without being combative. The peacemaker is not the one who avoids every hard conversation. The peacemaker is the one who enters necessary conflict without becoming consumed by it.

And this kind of peace begins inside before it ever shows up in a room. Often the first battlefield is our own interior life. We carry irritations, rehearse grievances, imagine defensive speeches, and nurture a quiet sense of self-righteousness. By the time the actual conversation happens, our inner weather is already stormy. That is why peacemaking often begins with a pause. Before speaking, before reacting, before replying to the message or forwarding the rumor, we need a moment in which grace can interrupt instinct. A slow breath. A whispered prayer. A silent reminder that the person in front of us is also made in the image of God, even if they are difficult, wrong, or frustrating. This does not erase the problem, but it changes the spirit in which we engage it.

There are practical ways to live this out. Enter one conversation today with gentleness rather than force. Not with timidity, but with curiosity. Ask a question before making an accusation. If you have contributed to tension, offer a sincere apology without dressing it up in excuses. If someone is acting destructively, set a boundary clearly and quietly. Hidden acts of peacemaking matter too. Refuse to pass along gossip. Seek clarification before assuming the worst about a message that irritated you. Pray silently for someone who regularly gets under your skin. These small acts may seem unimpressive, but they are often where the kingdom of God takes visible shape.

It also helps to carry a simple truth through the day: *I cannot control the storm, but I can choose to be an anchor of peace.* That sentence reflects the wisdom of Paul's words. We cannot force reconciliation. We cannot make every relationship healthy. We cannot singlehandedly resolve every conflict in our homes, churches, workplaces, or communities. But we can choose a faithful posture. We can be truthful without hostility, kind without compromise, and calm without surrendering conviction. We can do what depends on us.

That is enough for today.

We are not asked to dissolve every argument in the world or to fix every fracture around us. We are asked to walk with Christ in such a way that peace begins to take root in us. In a season of thresholds, when the world feels unsettled and many hearts remain cold, even one faithful act of peacemaking matters. So let your speech today be steadier. Let your listening be deeper. Let your strength be gentler. And where peace cannot yet be achieved, entrust the unfinished outcome to God, who alone can fully soften hearts and calm storms.

Prayer

Lord, grant me a restrained tongue, a steady spirit, and the courageous gentleness required to walk as a peacemaker in a fractured world. Give me the wisdom to discern when a quiet peace is possible and when firm boundaries are necessary for the good of all. Expand my heart with compassion for those carrying sudden grief, and for those living under the heavy shadows of fear and division. May my life be a threshold of grace today, bringing a foretaste of spring to every room I enter. *Amen*.

Devotion 34

The Mark of the Peacemaker: Living the Symbol

Scripture

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."— Matthew 5:9, NRSVCE

Reflection

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a portrait of the kingdom of heaven that is unlike the kingdoms human beings usually build. It is not marked by domination, image, or conquest, but by humility, mercy, hunger for righteousness, and purity of heart. Right in the middle of the Beatitudes, Jesus places a calling that is both beautiful and demanding: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." That sentence tells us something important not only about discipleship, but about the heart of God Himself. Peace is not an optional spiritual accessory. It is family resemblance. To become a peacemaker is to begin to look more like the Father whose love seeks restoration where the world has settled for fracture.

The modern world, too, has longed for peace in its own ways. In 1958, a designer named Gerald Holtom created a simple symbol for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: a circle containing lines drawn from semaphore signals, meant as a visual protest against the destructive powers of his age. Over time, that design became one of the most recognized peace symbols in the world. Its endurance says something about the human heart. Across generations, people have sensed that peace matters, that destruction is not what we were made for, and that the world aches for wholeness. But Jesus offers something deeper than a symbol. He does not merely call us to wish for peace or display it as an ideal. He calls us to practice it as a way of life. The symbol points toward hope; the Beatitudes call us toward embodied faithfulness.

Part of the challenge is that many of us think of peace too narrowly. We imagine peace as the absence of noise, tension, or disagreement—a quiet room, a calm day, the relief of not having to face conflict. But the biblical idea of peace, *shalom*, is far richer than silence or ease. Shalom means wholeness, right relationship, justice, harmony, and the restoration of what has been broken. It is not passive. It is active, sturdy, and often costly. When Jesus blesses peacemakers, He is not praising people who avoid discomfort at all costs. He is blessing those who step into places of tension and, by grace, begin the work of repair. Peacemaking is not the same as being agreeable. It is the holy labor of helping what is fractured move toward wholeness.

That kind of work is rarely glamorous. Most of the time, peacemaking happens not in great public moments, but in the ordinary friction of daily life. Imagine standing in a grocery store checkout line. The cashier is new and overwhelmed. The scanner keeps malfunctioning. The customer ahead of you is visibly irritated, sighing loudly, tapping a foot, and making sharp remarks. The room begins to fill with tension. In such a moment, the easiest options are passivity or escalation. The passive person says nothing and retreats inward, hoping the awkwardness will end soon. The aggressive person joins in the irritation, adding more heat to the room. But the peacemaker does something different. The peacemaker enters the gap.

That does not necessarily mean giving a speech or fixing everyone's mood. Often it looks much smaller. It may be a warm smile directed toward the flustered cashier. It may be a patient word

that lowers the emotional temperature. It may be the quiet refusal to join the complaint. It may simply be carrying a calm presence that interrupts the momentum of irritation. Such moments seem small, but they are not insignificant. These are the everyday bricks with which peace is built.

And this is where the call of Jesus becomes searching. Peacemaking is not only about world events or large conflicts. It is about our tone of voice in a family conversation, our words in a tense work email, our willingness to listen rather than instantly defend, our refusal to use sarcasm as a weapon, and our courage to apologize when apology would clear the air. Sometimes peacemaking means asking, "Can you help me understand what you meant?" instead of assuming the worst. Sometimes it means lowering your voice when the room is rising. Sometimes it means making the first move toward repair when every part of you wants the other person to move first.

That is often the hardest part. Peacemaking frequently stalls because each side is waiting for the other to begin. We tell ourselves that if they would apologize first, calm down first, or show humility first, then we could respond better. But grace rarely waits for ideal conditions. God did not wait for humanity to become easy to love before moving toward reconciliation. While we were still far off, Christ came near. That is what makes peacemaking such a deeply Christian vocation. When we choose repair over pride, mercy over scorekeeping, and understanding over retaliation, we are reflecting the God who made the first move toward us.

This does not mean peace at any price. Peacemaking is not pretending wrong is right, nor is it allowing abuse or injustice to continue unchecked. Real peace never asks us to lie about harm. In fact, because biblical peace includes truth and justice, peacemaking sometimes requires difficult honesty. But even then, the spirit matters. A peacemaker tells the truth in a way that seeks healing rather than humiliation. A peacemaker confronts when necessary, but does not delight in winning. A peacemaker aims not merely to silence conflict, but to open a path where restoration can begin.

That means every day offers opportunities to practice this vocation in ways that are small but deeply holy. If there is tension in your home, be the first to lower your voice. If there is misunderstanding at work, be the first to ask a genuinely curious question. If you encounter a stranger's frustration, be the first to offer grace instead of impatience. If a relationship has become strained, consider whether there is one step you can take toward repair—not because you are solely responsible for the outcome, but because peace often begins when someone is willing to move first.

The world knows how to display symbols of peace. What it aches to see is peace embodied. Jesus does not merely call us to admire peace from a distance. He blesses those who build it, practice it, and carry it into fractured places. And in doing so, He tells us something astonishing: peacemakers will be called children of God. Not because they are earning His love, but because in their actions the likeness of their Father becomes visible. So today, wherever you find yourself—in a home, a workplace, a checkout line, or a hard conversation—remember that peace is not just something to hope for. It is something to make. And every small act of repair becomes a witness that the Prince of Peace is still at work in His people.

Prayer

Gracious God, molder of our hearts, thank You for making peace with us through Your Son, Jesus. We ask that You would form us into true peacemakers today. When we face conflict, grant us a spirit that is gentle enough to listen but brave enough to speak the truth in love. Make us steady when the world around us is anxious, and quick to repair what is broken in our relationships. Help us to carry Your peace into our homes, our workplaces, and our neighborhoods, so that in our way of living, others might see a reflection of Your love. *Amen*.

Devotion 35

Speaking Life in the Checkout Line: Aligning Our Words with God's Heart

Scripture

"With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so."— James 3:9–10, NRSVCE

Reflection

Of all the tools we use in a day—our phones, our cars, our computers—none is as powerful or as unpredictable as the human voice. A few sentences can lift a weary spirit, steady a troubled heart, or bring peace into a tense room. Yet just as quickly, a few careless words can wound, discourage, humiliate, or harden someone we love. James understands this better than most. His letter is often called the Proverbs of the New Testament because it brings faith down from the clouds of abstract ideas into the soil of ordinary life. Here, he puts his finger on one of the most revealing contradictions in the Christian life: the disconnect between the words we use in worship and the words we use in the heat of daily frustration. His concern is not merely about avoiding certain forbidden words. It is about the spiritual direction of our speech. What comes out of our mouths reveals much about what is shaping our hearts.

Most of us know exactly the tension James describes. We know what it is to live with a gap between our "worshiping self" and our "reacting self." Consider an ordinary Tuesday morning. The clock is moving too fast, the coffee has not yet done its work, and the pressure of the day is already pressing in. A spouse forgets something important. A child spills cereal on the floor just as you are walking out the door. A text arrives at the wrong moment. In an instant, the tongue leaps ahead of grace. We snap. We speak with impatience, sarcasm, or that tone sharp enough to leave a bruise without ever being called shouting. We may not scream, but we cut. We reduce the person in front of us to a problem, an obstacle, or an irritation. Then, a short time later, we may bow our heads in prayer, sing a hymn, turn on a worship song, or say something kind and reverent about God. And James quietly holds up a mirror and says, in effect, *this ought not to be so*.

The problem is deeper than simple rudeness. James reminds us that human beings are made in the likeness of God. That means every person we speak to—even the frustrating one, the slow one, the difficult one, the rude one, the one who disagrees with us, the one who disappoints us—bears the imprint of the Creator. When we tear someone down with our words, we are not merely "venting." We are speaking against someone marked by God's own image. It is as if we say we love the Artist while slashing the canvas He made. That is why speech matters so much. Words are not just sounds that disappear. They are moral acts. They either honor the divine image in others or ignore it.

This is what makes the taming of the tongue about far more than politeness. It is about perception. It is about learning to see the fingerprint of God in the people who most test our patience. If we truly believed that the person across from us—whether in traffic, on the phone, in

our home, at church, or in a checkout line—was someone stamped with the dignity of God, our speech would begin to change. We might still need to speak truth. We might still need to set boundaries, correct, disagree, or address harm. But even then, the tone would be different. We would speak as those who remember that the other person is not simply an interruption to our peace, but a human being loved by God.

James is also painfully honest about how hard this is. The tongue is small, yet it directs much of life, like a rudder steering a ship or a spark setting a forest ablaze. In other words, he is not dealing with a minor issue. He is dealing with one of the chief ways the heart becomes visible. And because speech is tied so closely to impulse, pride, anger, and habit, this area of discipleship can feel frustratingly slow. We may genuinely want to sound more like Christ, yet find ourselves returning again and again to old patterns of impatience, sharpness, gossip, exaggeration, passive-aggressive remarks, or criticism. But James does not expose the problem in order to leave us in despair. He names it so that it can be healed. By bringing the contradiction into the light, he invites us to bring our "street speech" and our "sanctuary speech" into harmony.

That work begins with interruption. Before words leave the mouth, grace needs room to enter the moment. One of the simplest and holiest practices is a deliberate pause. Before replying to a frustrating email, before answering a provocative comment, before reacting to a family member's mistake or a stranger's attitude, stop for three seconds. In those few quiet seconds, breathe and ask the Holy Spirit to filter what is rising in you. That pause may seem small, but often it is the space in which blessing has a chance to replace cursing. The tongue is fast, but grace can be faster when invited.

Another helpful practice is to replace criticism with blessing whenever possible. This does not mean ignoring reality or pretending everything is fine. It means choosing to use your voice to build up rather than tear down. If you are standing in a long line and irritation is rising, instead of muttering about the cashier's slowness, say something kind: "Thank you for working so hard today." If a family member frustrates you, look for one sincere word of affirmation instead of adding more strain to the room. The world is already full of cutting speech. One gracious sentence can change the atmosphere more than we realize.

And because none of us will do this perfectly, the practice of repair is essential. When you do speak harshly—and at some point you will—do not simply move on and hope the moment disappears. Return to the person. Name what happened honestly. Say, "I spoke harshly, and I did not honor you. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?" That kind of humility is one of the clearest signs of spiritual maturity. It demonstrates that words matter enough to mend when they have wounded. Repair is not weakness. It is one of the strongest languages of love.

The goal, then, is not perfection overnight. It is progress through surrender. It is allowing the fresh water of the Holy Spirit to flush out the bitter waters of impatience, pride, and self-importance. God is not shocked by our struggle with this. He knows how quickly the tongue can run ahead of grace. But He is not finished with us. As we submit our speech to Him, He slowly teaches our mouths to become places from which life flows instead of harm. In a harsh and hurried world, that is no small witness. To speak with patience, truth, gentleness, and humility is to show that Christ is not only in our hymns and prayers, but in the ordinary language of our daily lives. And that kind of speech can heal, restore, and bless far more than we know.

Prayer

Lord and Father, we come to You acknowledging the power You have placed in our tongues. We confess that too often, the same mouth that sings Your praises also speaks harshness to Your children. Forgive us for the times we have failed to see Your image in the people around us.

We ask for the grace of restraint. Please put a guard over our mouths and a watch over the door of our lips. When we are tempted to be cynical, make us kind. When we want to be right, help us to be loving. Align our hearts with Yours, so that our words may be a source of blessing to everyone we encounter today. We ask this in the name of the One who is the Word made flesh, Jesus. *Amen*.

Devotion 36

Divine Connection: The Gift of Communication

Scripture

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone." — Colossians 4:6, NRSVCE

Reflection

Communication is one of God's great gifts. From the opening pages of Scripture, we meet a God who speaks. He speaks creation into existence. He walks with Adam and Eve in the garden. He reveals His heart through prophets, through Scripture, and ultimately through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Human communication, then, is not a small or accidental thing. It reflects something of the God who made us for relationship—with Himself and with one another. That is why words matter. They are more than tools for passing information. They can carry truth, comfort, encouragement, correction, love, and grace. They can also carry harm. In every age, the way people communicate shapes the life they build together.

The modern world has made communication almost instantaneous. Messages cross cities, nations, and continents in seconds. What once required days, weeks, or months can now happen with a tap of the finger. On the one hand, this is remarkable. On the other hand, it has made communication so easy that we often forget its weight. We can call, text, email, video chat, and post messages with almost no delay. Yet the very speed and convenience of these tools can tempt us to use them carelessly. We communicate constantly, but not always thoughtfully. We send more words than ever, while often pausing less to ask whether our words are truly healing, truthful, or necessary.

That tension invites reflection. Imagine for a moment a world in which long-distance communication had never developed beyond the slowest methods. Think of families separated by miles, unable to hear each other's voices except through occasional letters. Think of news traveling painfully slowly, of urgent needs waiting days for response, of encouragement delayed simply because there was no easy path for it to travel. The tools that now seem ordinary would have seemed astonishing. They have changed human life in profound ways, making connection easier, more immediate, and often more accessible. Yet even with all these advancements, something essential remains unchanged: the deepest question is not whether we can communicate, but how we do so.

Paul's words in Colossians are searching here. He urges believers to let their speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. That is a beautiful phrase because it suggests both kindness and substance. Gracious speech is not shallow or flattering. It is speech shaped by the grace of Christ. Speech seasoned with salt has flavor, wisdom, and preserving power. It is thoughtful, appropriate, and life-giving. Paul does not simply tell Christians to talk more nicely. He tells them to let grace govern the tone and quality of their communication. In other words, what comes out of our mouths—or through our keyboards—should reflect the One who lives within our hearts.

This matters perhaps more now than ever. The world is full of digital noise: hurried texts, reactive comments, endless debates, sarcastic posts, and thoughtless words sent quickly because the medium makes it easy. Technology has not changed the moral nature of speech; it has simply increased its speed and reach. A careless remark can now wound at a distance. A harsh comment can spread farther than we intended. A rumor can travel before truth has time to put on its shoes. Yet the opposite is also true. A word of encouragement can travel instantly. A prayer can be offered over the phone. A message of hope can reach someone in loneliness within moments. The same tools that can distract or divide can also be used to build up, strengthen, and bless.

There is a story of a missionary family living in a remote place where communication with loved ones was possible only through an old telephone kept in a town many miles away. Every message required effort, patience, and planning. News was precious because it was costly. That image raises a sobering question for us. When communication required so much effort, people treasured it more deeply. Now that communication is easy, do we value it less? We have the ability to call, text, or write within seconds, yet how often do we use that ability to genuinely encourage someone, to offer prayer, to mend a strained relationship, or to speak the love of Christ into another person's day? Convenience has increased, but intentionality has not always kept pace.

This is where Christian discipleship becomes very practical. Technology is a tool, and tools are never neutral in the life of the soul. A hammer can build a home or break a window. A phone can be used to comfort someone or to ignore the person sitting right next to us. The internet can spread truth or confusion, compassion or cruelty. The issue is not simply whether we use these tools, but whether we use them in a way that reflects Christ. Do our messages carry patience or irritation? Do our posts breathe life or stir contempt? Do our conversations make room for prayer, encouragement, and truth? Or are they shaped by the same hurried sharpness that governs so much of the surrounding world?

One faithful response is to become more intentional with the communication already available to us. A simple text can become an act of ministry if it carries encouragement instead of obligation. A phone call can become holy ground when we use it not only to exchange information, but to listen well and pray with someone. Social media, often a place of noise, can become a place where a verse of Scripture, a word of hope, or a thoughtful testimony quietly points someone toward God. Even the choice to pause before sending a message can be an act of discipleship. Before pressing send, it is worth asking: Is this gracious? Is it truthful? Is it necessary? Does it reflect the heart of Christ?

That kind of intentionality also applies to our closest relationships. No technology, however advanced, can replace the power of words spoken face-to-face with love, humility, and care. A call matters, but so does the tone in the kitchen, the patience in the car, the gentleness in a difficult conversation, and the willingness to listen without rushing to answer. Communication is not only about transmission. It is about communion. It is about creating space where truth and love can meet.

So perhaps the question for today is simple: how might you use the gift of communication more faithfully? You do not need to transform the whole digital world. Start with one message, one

call, one conversation, one prayer. Send a note of encouragement to someone who is weary. Call a family member not merely to check a box, but to truly connect. Share something that brings hope rather than noise. Refuse to let your tools control your spirit; instead, place your tools in the service of Christ.

No matter how advanced our methods of communication become, the deeper calling remains the same. Jesus invites us to let our speech reflect His grace. Whether through a phone call, a text, a handwritten note, an email, or a face-to-face conversation, our words are meant to carry something of His life into the world. They are meant to strengthen, not shatter; to heal, not harden; to bless, not merely react. In an age overflowing with communication, the Christian calling is not to speak more loudly, but to speak more faithfully—so that every word, however small, may count for His glory.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of communication and the tools that allow us to connect with others. Help us to use our words wisely, with grace and kindness, reflecting the love of Christ in all we say. May we not take for granted the opportunities we have to encourage, uplift, and share the Gospel with others. Guide our conversations today so that they may be pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. *Amen*.

Devotion 37

The Promise of Letting Go: Honoring Father and Mother

Scripture

"Honor your father and mother"—this is the first commandment with a promise: "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." — Ephesians 6:2-3, NRSVCE

Reflection

Shrove Tuesday, known to many as Mardi Gras, carries a meaning that runs much deeper than public festivity. While the world often thinks of it as a final day of indulgence before Lent, the older word *shrove* comes from *shrive*—to confess, to receive absolution, and to undergo a kind of spiritual cleaning before entering the penitential season. That makes this day an appropriate threshold, a moment to pause and clear what has been cluttering the soul before the journey of Lent begins. And there are few areas of the heart more in need of such honest cleaning than the painful and complicated command to honor our father and mother. It is one of the most foundational commands God has given, and also one of the hardest for many people to hear. Scripture even attaches a promise to it: "so that it may be well with you." But what does that mean for those whose parents were not sources of safety, wisdom, or tenderness? What does honor look like when the relationship itself has been marked by hurt?

For many people, the command to honor father and mother does not stir warm feelings. It stirs tension. Some hear those words and immediately feel resistance because the faces that come to mind are not gentle ones. Some carry deep wounds from fathers who were absent, harsh, controlling, or abusive. Others ache from mothers who were critical, cold, manipulative, or incapable of the nurture they were meant to give. Still others bear the quieter but no less painful marks of neglect, emotional distance, or a home in which love was inconsistent and trust rarely safe. In such cases, the command to honor can sound almost impossible, or worse, like permission to excuse harm. But biblical honor is not the same as pretending evil was good. It is not a demand to lie about what happened. Nor is it a command to ignore boundaries, tolerate abuse, or deny the reality of pain.

A better picture may help. Imagine cleaning out an old garage or basement that has become a storage place for everything unresolved. Over the years, boxes have been stacked into every corner—boxes filled with broken tools, yellowed receipts, things you meant to sort through but never did, and objects too painful or confusing to deal with. At first, the clutter seems manageable. You step around it. You tell yourself you will address it later. But over time, the room becomes harder to move through. The boxes begin to block the space. You stumble over them. Dust thickens. What was once merely ignored becomes a hazard.

Resentment toward our parents can become like that cluttered room. The harsh words, the neglect, the disappointments, the old humiliations, the lack of affection, the mistakes that shaped us more than we wanted—these things often get stacked into the corners of the soul. We may not deal with them directly. We may tell ourselves we are simply moving on. But what remains undealt with continues to occupy space. We trip over it in present relationships. We react more sharply than we understand. We carry old anger into new rooms. The past keeps interrupting the present because it has never really been brought into the light.

In that sense, honoring our parents is less about endorsing them and more about refusing to let bitterness continue to govern our inner world. To honor here means, in part, to tell the truth about what happened while also placing that truth into the hands of God. It means acknowledging that our parents were not gods, but flawed and sinful human beings—often acting out of their own wounds, immaturities, fears, and unhealed histories. Seeing that does not erase what they did. It does not make the damage unreal. But it does help us stop living as though their failures must continue to define the atmosphere of our own hearts.

Forgiveness is central here, but forgiveness is frequently misunderstood. It is not saying the pain was small. It is not calling injustice acceptable. It is not canceling wisdom, boundaries, or consequences. It is not pretending reconciliation is always possible or wise. Forgiveness is, more deeply, releasing the debt. It is surrendering the right to keep collecting emotional payment from the one who wounded you. It is handing the final judgment of that person over to God. And often, forgiveness is not a one-time emotional event. It is a repeated act of surrender, chosen again and again whenever the old injury rises to claim fresh territory in the soul.

This is where the promise attached to the command begins to make more sense. “So that it may be well with you” is not a manipulative bargain, as though God were saying, “Approve of everything your parents did and I will reward you.” Rather, it points toward the healing that comes when resentment no longer rules the inner life. Bitterness has a way of poisoning the person who carries it. The one who was harmed keeps reliving the harm because the offense has become lodged in the soul like an unwelcome tenant. Releasing that bitterness is not letting the offender off the hook before God. It is allowing yourself to step out of the cluttered basement of the past and into a more open, breathable place where peace can begin to grow.

This is why a day like Shrove Tuesday can be so fitting for this work. Before Lent begins in earnest, it invites us to spiritual cleaning. Not superficial tidying, but the deeper clearing that confession makes possible. If resentment toward a parent has been sitting in the corners of your heart, one faithful practice may be to write a letter you never intend to send. Pour out the anger, grief, disappointment, and the specific memories that still sting. Name what happened plainly. Do not minimize it. Let the truth come out before God. Then, rather than mailing it, destroy it—tear it up, shred it, or burn it safely. Not because the pain is unreal, but because you are symbolically placing that judgment in God’s hands. You are saying, in effect, “This wound is real, but I will no longer let it occupy my whole house.”

That act may not instantly remove every ache. Healing is often slower than one symbolic gesture. But such a practice can begin the work of evicting bitterness. It can make room for prayer. It can create space for the grace of God to enter places long sealed off. And it can help you remember that your deepest identity is not determined only by the home you came from, but by the God who receives you as His child.

For many, this is where hope finally enters. God is the ultimate Parent, the One who does not fail in the ways earthly parents do. He is able to meet the places where fathers were absent and mothers fell short. He is able to hold both justice and mercy without confusion. He is able to heal what others damaged. So honoring your parents, in the deepest Christian sense, is not chiefly about polishing their memory. It is about entrusting your pain to God so that the past no longer tyrannizes your present. It is a movement toward freedom.

That is why this command, difficult as it is, can become a key rather than a burden. It does not lock you into yesterday. It helps unlock the possibility of a heart less crowded by resentment and more available to grace. And that is one of the quiet mercies of this threshold day: before Lent begins, God invites you to set something down, to clear some space, and to let it be well with your soul.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, on this day of preparation, I bring the relationships with my parents before You. You know the history, the hurts, and the scars I carry. I ask for the supernatural strength to forgive where human strength fails. Help me to release the resentment I have held in my heart, not because the actions were acceptable, but because I desire the peace You promised. Heal my memories, comfort my inner child, and help me to honor my parents by placing them into Your hands, so that it may be truly well with my soul. *Amen*.

Devotion 38

The Topsy-Turvy Kingdom: Redefining "Blessed"

Scripture

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." — Matthew 5:3–5, NRSVCE

Reflection

When we hear the word **blessed**, most of us instinctively think of something visible and desirable: a steady income, a healthy family, a secure home, a life that seems to be going well. We measure blessing by what appears gained, stable, or successful. But when Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount, He turns that instinct upside down. The Beatitudes are not a ladder to climb or a list of spiritual achievements we must earn in order to qualify for God's favor. They are a revelation of the kingdom of God. They show us what life looks like when God's rule breaks into the world, and in that kingdom, the honored guests are often the very people the world has learned to overlook.

There is a kind of "topsy-turvy" image in old stories like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, where for a brief moment the social order is reversed. The lowliest person is crowned, the powerful are mocked, and everything is turned on its head. For a day, the world plays with reversal. Jesus' Beatitudes also speak of reversal, but not as a passing spectacle. This is no temporary festival. This is the enduring logic of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus looks at the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted, and He calls them blessed. In other words, He names as fortunate those whom the world often sees as weak, vulnerable, or insignificant.

That is deeply unsettling because it exposes how differently we and God often see. We tend to assume that the truly blessed are the strong, the successful, the self-assured, and the admired. We think blessing means being above trouble, above grief, above dependence. But Jesus points in the opposite direction. He points toward those who know their need, those whose hearts have been broken open, those who are not armored by pride or insulated by power. He is not romanticizing suffering or saying pain is good in itself. He is revealing where God's attention rests. The people the world pities, dismisses, or steps around are often the very people nearest to the heart of His kingdom.

This is what might be called the great divine reversal. The cross itself stands at the center of that reversal. To the world, the cross looked like defeat, weakness, shame, and foolishness. It appeared to be the collapse of hope. Yet in God's wisdom, the cross became the place of greatest victory. What looked low became glorious. What seemed foolish became the power of salvation. The Beatitudes prepare us to see the world through that same lens. They teach us that God is not dazzled by the things that usually impress human beings. He is not drawn first to loudness, wealth, status, or self-sufficiency. He is near to the brokenhearted. He lifts up the lowly. He fills the hungry. He honors those who have learned to depend on Him.

That means the Beatitudes are not merely descriptions of certain personality types. They are a portrait of how God's kingdom touches human life. The poor in spirit are blessed because they know they need God. Those who mourn are blessed because God's comfort comes near to sorrow. The meek are blessed because they do not have to seize the earth by force to receive what God gives. The merciful are blessed because they are already participating in the heart of God. The peacemakers are blessed because they resemble their Father. Even the persecuted are blessed, not because suffering is pleasant, but because their loyalty shows they belong to a kingdom that the world does not control.

This also means that the Beatitudes are not asking us to try harder to become miserable. Jesus is not telling us to manufacture sadness or poverty so that we can qualify for grace. He is asking us to see more clearly. He is teaching us to change our vision. We are meant to look around us and recognize what God recognizes. The overlooked person at work, the grieving widow, the one who is quietly carrying shame, the single parent, the weary caregiver, the struggling addict trying to find a foothold, the person with no social power, the one everyone else talks over—these are not marginal people in the kingdom of God. They are often standing much closer to the center than anyone realizes.

That shift in vision is one of the great challenges of discipleship. It is easy to admire the Beatitudes as beautiful words while continuing to honor the world's ladder of success in practice. We may still instinctively give our attention to the polished, the confident, and the influential while overlooking those Christ calls blessed. But the kingdom asks us to practice a different kind of vision. Instead of asking, "Who is winning?" it teaches us to ask, "Whom is God drawing near to?" Instead of looking for those who seem most impressive, it teaches us to honor those who bear quiet burdens, hidden griefs, and humble dependence.

A faithful response, then, is surprisingly practical. Look around your own life and ask where the Beatitudes are already embodied. Who is mourning? Who is overlooked? Who is carrying quiet spiritual poverty, aware of their need but unsure whether anyone sees? Then ask a second question: how would I treat this person if I truly believed Jesus when He called them blessed? That may mean slowing down enough to listen. It may mean offering dignity rather than pity. It may mean refusing to speak over someone whose voice is easily missed. It may mean honoring a person the world has already ranked as small.

The freedom in all this is immense. If Jesus is right, then we do not need to keep scrambling up the world's ladder to prove our worth. We do not have to spend our lives chasing the kind of blessing that depends on appearance, approval, or accumulation. The kingdom frees us from that exhausting competition. It teaches us that God's favor is not reserved for the visibly successful, but is poured out in surprising places. It calls us to walk humbly, to see deeply, and to honor what the world ignores.

God's ways are not our ways. The world rewards the loud, the rich, and the self-sufficient, but God is tenderly attentive to the humble and the hurting. The seeming foolishness of the gospel is that God uses what looks weak to reveal true strength. When we accept this topsy-turvy reality, we stop living as though worldly success were the measure of blessing. We begin instead to recognize the beauty of the kingdom, where the overlooked are seen, the lowly are lifted, and those who depend on God are already standing in the place of honor.

Prayer

Gracious and Topsy-Turvy God, we confess that we often seek blessings that we can count, store, and show off. Give us eyes to see the world as You see it. Help us to recognize the beauty in the brokenhearted and the strength in the meek. Soften our hearts toward those the world deems "unblessed," and remind us that Your glory is most often found in the places we least expect. Grant us the wisdom to seek the "foolishness" of the cross and the courage to walk in kindness and justice alongside all Your children. *Amen*.

Devotion 39

The Orbit of Truth: Courage, Science, and a Gentle Spirit

Scripture

"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out." — Proverbs 25:2, NRSVCE

Reflection

Scripture invites us to be people of both curiosity and integrity. God is not honored by willful ignorance, nor is He threatened by the honest study of His creation. He calls His people to a courageous faith that loves truth wherever it is found—whether in Scripture, in history, or in the natural world. Such faith does not panic when discovery stretches our understanding. It trusts that whatever is true ultimately belongs to God, because He is the Author of all reality. The same God who inspired His Word also formed the heavens, shaped the laws of nature, and embedded order into creation itself. That means Christians need not fear truth. We are free to seek it with reverence, humility, and wonder.

Christians have sometimes spoken of the "Book of Scripture" and the "Book of Nature." The phrase is helpful because it reminds us that both come from the same divine Author. If rightly understood, they cannot finally contradict one another. Truth discovered under a microscope, traced in the stars, preserved in history, or revealed in the Gospels is still God's truth. Because of that, the Christian should not see science, research, or inquiry as enemies of faith. On the contrary, a living faith should produce a deep love of reality, because reality itself is the theater of God's glory. To study the world honestly is, in its own way, to stand in awe of the One who made it.

Of course, loving truth is easier to affirm in theory than to practice when the truth unsettles us. History shows again and again that people often resist reality when it threatens comfort, power, or long-held assumptions. Galileo Galilei faced that kind of resistance when he defended the truth that the Earth revolves around the Sun. His insistence on what could be observed and reasoned was not merely a scientific debate; it disrupted established patterns of authority and understanding. Centuries later, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn faced a different but equally costly challenge. By exposing the horrors of the Soviet gulag system, he forced people to confront a reality many preferred to hide or deny. In very different ways, both men remind us that aligning oneself with truth often comes at a price. People do not always welcome the real when the real is inconvenient.

Yet the Christian calling is not merely to be correct. It is to be righteous in the way we hold and speak the truth. That distinction matters greatly. Truth can be wielded with pride just as easily as error can be defended with fear. The goal is not to become people who enjoy being right. The goal is to become people who love what is real because we love the God of truth. That means our posture matters. We are called not only to seek the truth, but to receive it humbly and to speak it gently.

A simple picture from everyday life helps clarify this. Imagine a master carpenter framing a house. In order to make sure the walls stand straight, he uses a spirit level. When the bubble

shows that a wall is crooked, the carpenter does not grow angry at the level or smash it for delivering unwelcome news. He does not accuse the tool of betrayal because it exposed a flaw. Instead, he adjusts his work to match the standard. The point of the level is not to shame the builder, but to help him build what is sound and true.

Science, history, and honest inquiry often function in a similar way. They become instruments that help us see reality more clearly. When evidence, facts, or careful observation challenge our preferences, assumptions, or traditions, we face a choice. We can resist the truth because it is uncomfortable, or we can allow it to correct us. Christian maturity means learning to make that adjustment with humility. It means asking not only, "Do I like this?" but, "Is this true?" It means recognizing that reality does not bend to preserve our comfort, and that God is not dishonored when we have to rethink something in the light of better understanding.

This kind of honesty also requires courage. It takes courage to let go of cherished assumptions when evidence points another way. It takes courage to name painful realities in history, in society, or in our own personal lives. And it takes courage to hold to the truth without becoming hard-hearted in the process. Galileo and Solzhenitsyn each remind us that truth is durable, but their stories also remind us that people can suffer for standing inside it. For Christians, that means we must cultivate both backbone and gentleness. We need enough conviction not to abandon truth when it becomes costly, and enough humility not to weaponize truth against those who cannot yet see it.

That balance is especially important in ordinary life. We may not be defending scientific discoveries before an inquisition or exposing the crimes of a regime, but we all encounter smaller moments where truth tests us. Someone points out a flaw in our reasoning. A fact challenges our opinion. A medical result, a historical reality, or a hard piece of feedback confronts us with something we would rather avoid. In those moments, the question is not only whether we will accept the truth, but how we will respond to it. Will we become defensive because it is uncomfortable? Or will we pause and ask whether God may be using this unwelcome truth to straighten something in us?

This is why curiosity itself can become a spiritual discipline. To learn something new about astronomy, biology, engineering, medicine, or the wider created order is not to wander away from God. It can become an act of praise. It is a way of saying, "Lord, I want to know the world You made." It is also why humility matters so much. When we encounter a truth that contradicts our preference, we do well to ask, "Am I resisting this because it is false, or because it unsettles me?" That question can save us from confusing discomfort with discernment.

And when we speak truth to others, grace must shape our tone. Truth spoken with arrogance often drives people away from the very reality we hope they will see. It is possible to be factually correct and spiritually unfaithful in the way we communicate. Christians should be marked not only by intellectual honesty, but by a manner of speech that reflects the patience of Christ. If we must correct a misunderstanding or speak a hard truth, let it be done without venom, without triumph, and without contempt. The God of truth is also the God of mercy.

God is the architect of the universe, and He is not intimidated by telescopes, laboratories, historical research, or difficult questions. Faith does not require retreat from intellectual rigor. It calls us to engage reality with wonder, honesty, and trust. The more truly we see, the more

deeply we may worship. So let us be disciples who seek truth fearlessly, receive it humbly, and speak it gently—trusting that the God who made the stars is also the One who steadies our hearts.

Prayer

Creator of all things, we thank You for the vastness of the universe and the intricacy of the atom, all of which testify to Your glory. We pray today for those working in science, medicine, and research; grant them wisdom and integrity as they uncover the mysteries of Your creation. Give us the courage to love the truth even when it is costly, and the grace to speak it without cynicism or bitterness. May our pursuit of knowledge always lead us back to a posture of humility and worship. *Amen*.

Devotion 40

Unhidden Light: The City on a Hill

Scripture

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." — Matthew 5:14–16, NRSVCE

Reflection

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus looks at a crowd of ordinary people—fishermen, farmers, laborers, and those with no obvious worldly importance—and gives them a startling identity. He does not tell them to strive until one day they might become something radiant. He does not say, "Try hard enough, and perhaps eventually you will shine." He simply says, "You are the light of the world." That is an astonishing statement. It means that the life of God within His people is not meant to remain private, hidden, or carefully tucked away. It is meant to be visible. Just as a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, so the life shaped by Christ is meant to become living evidence of God's love in the world. The question, then, is not whether we possess light, but whether we are allowing that light to do what it was given to do.

Light is fascinating because it never exists merely for itself. Its purpose is always to benefit others. A lamp does not shine in order to admire its own brightness. A candle is not lit so that it may gaze upon itself. Light exists to reveal, to guide, to warm, and to make life navigable for those around it. That is why Jesus' image is so practical. Think of a power outage during a storm. The house suddenly goes dark. Instinctively, you begin feeling your way toward a flashlight, lantern, or candle. The moment it is lit, you do not hide it under a blanket or shove it inside a drawer. That would defeat its purpose. Instead, you place it where its light can reach the most people in the room. From that higher place, a small beam can become enough for everyone to move more safely, to avoid stumbling, to find what is needed, and to breathe a little easier.

Jesus uses a common household image—a lamp and a basket—to expose how often we do the opposite with the light entrusted to us. We have the light of Christ, but we are tempted to hide it under all sorts of coverings. Sometimes it is fear: what will people think if I stand out too much? Sometimes it is apathy: it seems easier to stay quiet, blend in, and let someone else carry the burden of visible goodness. Sometimes it is conformity: we do not want to appear different from the surrounding culture, so we lower the brightness of faith until it is barely noticeable. And sometimes the basket is discouragement. We convince ourselves that our light is too small to matter, so we let it remain covered rather than offering what we have.

But Jesus' point is not that every believer must become flashy or loud. In fact, real light does not need to shout. It simply shines. Its effect is felt in what it makes possible for others. A life marked by kindness, integrity, patience, mercy, and quiet courage changes the atmosphere around it. It becomes easier for others to breathe, to hope, and to recognize something of God's goodness. Light does not draw attention merely to itself. It helps people see where they are, where they can step safely, and where they might find the path home.

That is why being the light of the world is not about showing off holiness or performing spirituality for admiration. It is about usefulness in the kingdom of God. A person who lives authentically and lovingly becomes a kind of illumination in the ordinary places of life. In a workplace where gossip and cynicism have become normal, one person who refuses to join in and instead offers encouragement becomes light. In a home where tension has thickened the air, the first person to apologize, to soften their tone, or to serve without needing applause becomes light. In a grocery store, a doctor's office, a church hallway, or an online conversation, one patient and gracious response can push back more darkness than we realize.

The reason this matters so much is that darkness is often very ordinary. It is not always dramatic evil. Sometimes it is simply harshness, discouragement, indifference, selfishness, coldness, or despair. A room can grow dark one sarcastic word, one withheld kindness, one act of cowardice, or one neglected opportunity at a time. But in just the same way, light often enters quietly. It enters through small practical acts that are done with love. A grateful word to a weary service worker. A refusal to pass along gossip. A text of encouragement sent at the right moment. A listening ear offered when someone else is too busy to care. A choice to remain honest when cutting corners would be easier. These may seem modest, but they are the very things that let Christ's light become visible in the world.

The phrase Jesus uses is also deeply communal: the lamp gives light to all in the house. That means your light is not just for strangers far away. It is first for the people nearest to you. The ones in your house—your family, your coworkers, your church community, your neighborhood—are often the first to experience whether your light is actually shining. It is possible to be outwardly impressive and inwardly shadowed at home. That is why one of the most searching questions we can ask is not simply, "Am I doing good things?" but, "Who in my immediate circle needs more light from me today?" Who needs patience instead of irritation? Who needs encouragement instead of silence? Who needs a visible act of grace that makes the room easier to live in?

This kind of light is not perfection. Jesus is not saying that believers must never falter, never struggle, or never cast shadows of their own. Rather, He is saying that our identity in Him carries a public dimension. If He lives in us, then His life will become visible through us in ways that others can actually experience. That visibility is not for our glory. Jesus makes that clear when He says that people will see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. The point of shining is not that people admire the lamp. It is that they see more clearly because of it. A truly Christ-shaped life does not end in self-display. It points beyond itself to the goodness of God.

So today, the invitation is simple: remove one basket. Lift one covering. Do one practical thing that lets the light of Christ be seen more clearly through your life. Refuse the cynical comment. Offer the patient reply. Be the first to serve. Be the first to mend. Speak gratitude aloud. Let the life of God in you become useful to someone else. The world does not only need more opinions, more noise, or more self-promotion. It needs light—steady, humble, visible light that helps people find their footing.

Being salt and light is not about being perfect or impressive. It is about being present, faithful, and unhidden. When we stop covering the life Christ has placed within us, the room begins to

brighten. And in that brightness, others may begin to see not us, but the God whose love has made us shine.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for sparking a light within me that darkness cannot overcome. Forgive me for the times I have hidden that light out of fear or convenience. Today, give me the courage to be a city on a hill—visible, welcoming, and unashamed. Help me to live in such a way that my actions bring warmth to those around me and point them back to Your incredible love. May my life be a lampstand that benefits everyone in the house. *Amen*.

Closing Reflection

By the time you reach the end of a book like this, you may not feel as though you have arrived somewhere dramatic. There may be no trumpet sound, no sudden burst of certainty, no sense that every question has been answered or every burden removed. More often, the journey of faith leaves us changed in quieter ways. We have prayed through some shadows, named some weariness, remembered some truths we nearly let slip away, and perhaps found that God has been nearer than we realized all along.

That is often how grace works.

The Christian life is rarely lived in a straight line. It unfolds in seasons—some bright with joy, others marked by waiting, grief, fatigue, or uncertainty. There are stretches when hope comes easily, and others when hope must be carried like a candle cupped against the wind. There are times when prayer rises naturally, and times when prayer feels like little more than a whisper, a sigh, or a groan too deep for words. There are seasons of strength, and others in which perseverance is not heroic but simply the holy act of not letting go. Yet through all of it, God remains faithful.

That faithfulness has been the quiet thread running through these pages.

Hope is not the denial of pain. It is the refusal to believe that pain gets the final word. Christian hope does not require us to pretend that life is easy, that wounds are shallow, or that the night is short. It simply teaches us to look beyond the night toward the God who is still at work within it. Hope says that ashes are not the end, that wilderness is not wasted, that graves do not have the last word, and that even beneath the frost, life is already stirring.

Prayer is how we keep turning toward that truth.

Prayer is not reserved for the polished and composed. It belongs just as much to the tired, the uncertain, the wounded, and the afraid. It is the language of dependence. It is the steady rhythm by which the heart returns to God again and again, even when the words feel small. Sometimes prayer is praise. Sometimes it is lament. Sometimes it is intercession, confession, silence, or surrender. But always it is relationship. Always it is the turning of the soul toward the One who listens, receives, and remains.

Perseverance grows there.

Most of us would prefer a faith that feels triumphant all the time, but much of discipleship is formed in ordinary endurance. Perseverance is built in the repeated decision to trust God one more day, to pray one more prayer, to take one more step, to refuse one more lie, to offer one more kindness, to begin again one more time. It is rarely flashy. It often looks like hidden faithfulness. But heaven sees it. And over time, what feels small becomes strong. Roots go deeper. The soul becomes steadier. What once would have shattered us may still wound us, but it no longer defines us.

Then, often in ways we did not expect, light begins to return.

Not all at once. Not always dramatically. Sometimes it comes as a softening of fear, a renewed capacity to pray, a long-awaited peace, a word of encouragement at the right moment, or the first quiet sense that we are not alone after all. Sometimes it comes through another person's kindness. Sometimes through Scripture newly alive in the heart. Sometimes through tears that finally come, or forgiveness that slowly begins, or strength that arrives just when our own has failed. Returning light rarely asks permission to enter. It simply begins to shine, and once it does, we realize that dawn was on its way long before we could see it.

That is the promise beneath all faithful devotion: God is always at work ahead of our sight.

So as you close this book, perhaps the best response is not to ask whether you have mastered anything, but whether you are more willing to keep walking. More willing to hope when life is hard. More willing to pray honestly. More willing to persevere without needing immediate results. More willing to notice the first signs of returning light. The goal of devotion is not performance. It is abiding. It is learning to live with your face turned toward God.

And that is enough.

If you are still in a hard season, do not mistake unfinishedness for abandonment. God is not absent because the chapter is difficult. If you are carrying sorrow, keep bringing it to Him. If you are weary, let Him sustain you. If you are waiting, trust that hidden growth is still taking place. If the light has begun to return, receive it with gratitude and humility. And if you have found strength through these pages, let that strength become gentleness for someone else who is still in the dark.

The journey of faith continues after the final page.

Hope will still be needed. Prayer will still be your lifeline. Perseverance will still be your quiet offering. And the light of Christ will still be rising, again and again, over the landscape of your life.

So keep walking.

The God who has held you this far is not finished with you yet.

A Prayer for the Long Road

Gracious and faithful God,

As we come to the end of these pages, we give You thanks for walking with us through every season they have held—through hope and heaviness, through prayer and silence, through perseverance and waiting, through darkness and the first signs of returning light.

Thank You for being the God who does not abandon us in the wilderness. Thank You for meeting us in our questions, our weariness, our repentance, our longing, and our need. Thank You for reminding us again and again that Your grace is sufficient, Your mercy is new every morning, and Your love remains steady even when our hearts grow tired.

Lord, for every reader who has traveled this far, strengthen what is weak, soften what has grown hard, and heal what still aches within. Where there is discouragement, breathe fresh courage. Where there is grief, bring comfort. Where there is confusion, grant peace. Where there is hidden pain, shine Your gentle light. Where there is weariness in doing good, renew the soul with the quiet assurance that no act of faithfulness offered to You is ever lost.

Teach us to keep walking with You on the long road of discipleship. When the path is bright, keep us humble and grateful. When the path is shadowed, keep us trusting and near to You. When we feel strong, guard us from pride. When we feel weak, guard us from despair. Help us to pray honestly, hope deeply, persevere patiently, and love faithfully.

Make us people of returning light. Let Your presence rise again and again over the landscapes of our lives, until even our wounds begin to testify to Your goodness. Shape us into those who carry hope gently, speak grace truthfully, and reflect Christ quietly in the places You have called us to serve.

And when the road feels long, remind us that we do not walk it alone. Christ goes before us, the Spirit dwells within us, and Your everlasting arms are beneath us. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith, and lead us onward until the day when all sorrow is healed, all darkness is scattered, and all things are made new.

We place our lives, our hopes, our unanswered prayers, and our unfinished stories into Your loving hands.

Carry us forward, O Lord, and keep us faithful to the very end.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

About the Author

Kenny Sallee, ThM is a Christian writer, Bible teacher, and ministry leader whose work is shaped by a deep love for Scripture, pastoral care, and the steady faithfulness of everyday life. Through devotionals, reflections, and prayers, he seeks to encourage readers to walk closely with Christ through seasons of joy, sorrow, repentance, endurance, and hope.

His writing grows out of the conviction that God is present not only in life's mountaintop moments, but also in its wilderness stretches, quiet roads, and hidden places of grace. With a warm and thoughtful voice, Kenny often weaves together biblical truth, personal reflection, history, and the rhythms of the Christian year to help others see the light of Christ more clearly in daily life.

Kenny has studied Divinity through Christian Leaders Institute and Theology through North Central Theological Seminary, and his ministry reflects both theological grounding and a pastor's heart. In addition to his writing, he serves faithfully in church leadership and ministry, including as Bishop's Warden, Bible teacher, and spiritual encourager within his church community. His calling has long been rooted in helping others engage Scripture, deepen their prayer lives, and recognize God's presence in both ordinary and difficult seasons.

He lives with his wife in the desert Southwest, where they raise equines on their ranch. The wide skies, rugged beauty, and quiet rhythms of ranch life continue to inspire both his writing and his walk with God.

Desert Light is offered as a pastoral companion for readers learning, day by day, to hope deeply, pray honestly, persevere faithfully, and trust the God who always brings light in due time.

A Note to Readers

Dear Reader,

Thank you for spending time with these pages.

Desert Light was written for the road most of us know well—the road that winds through hope and sorrow, prayer and silence, endurance and waiting, weakness and returning strength. These devotions were gathered with the belief that God meets us not only in moments of celebration, but also in long seasons of uncertainty, in quiet acts of faithfulness, and in the places where we are still learning to trust Him.

This is not a book for people who have everything figured out. It is for those who are still walking. It is for those who have prayed through dark nights, carried unanswered questions, started over more than once, and yet still long to keep their hearts turned toward Christ. If that is where you find yourself, then you are the kind of reader I had in mind.

You do not need to read this book quickly. In fact, it may serve you better slowly. You may wish to read one devotion at a time, sit quietly with a single paragraph, return to a prayer more than once, or mark a page that seems written for a particular season of your life. Let these reflections be a companion rather than a schedule. There is no race here. Only an invitation to pause, reflect, pray, and continue onward in grace.

Some of these pages were born out of Scripture, some out of history, some out of personal reflection, and some out of the ordinary burdens and beauties of daily life. All of them are offered with one hope: that they might help you see the faithfulness of God more clearly. Not perfectly, not all at once, but enough to take the next step. Enough to remember that the light of Christ is never absent, even when it seems delayed.

If a page here comforts you, give thanks to God. If a page convicts you, listen gently and prayerfully. If a page meets you in sorrow, know that you are not alone. And if a page becomes a lamp for your path, I pray that its light will not end with you, but will be carried into the lives of others who also need hope.

Thank you for allowing me to walk beside you for a little while.

May the Lord strengthen your heart, steady your steps, and keep turning your face toward His light.

Grace and peace,

Kenny Sallee, ThM

Acknowledgments

With gratitude, I give thanks first to **God**, whose mercy has sustained me, whose Word has guided me, and whose light has continued to shine through every season of joy, sorrow, waiting, and renewal. Without His grace, none of these pages would have been written.

I am deeply thankful for **Jesus Christ**, who meets us in the wilderness, walks with us on the long road, and remains faithful even when our own strength runs thin. Every devotional in this book is, in one way or another, an expression of trust in His unchanging love.

I also give heartfelt thanks for the presence and work of the **Holy Spirit**, who comforts, convicts, teaches, and gently leads us into truth. Many of these reflections were shaped in quiet moments of prayer, dependence, and listening.

To my **wife**, thank you for your companionship, encouragement, patience, and love. The shared life we have built in the desert Southwest, along with the daily rhythms of ranch life and ministry, has given shape, texture, and quiet beauty to much of my writing.

I am grateful for the people of my **church community**, where faith is lived not only in worship, but in service, prayer, friendship, and perseverance. Thank you for the many ways you have encouraged me, challenged me, and reminded me that the Christian life is never meant to be walked alone.

My thanks also go to those who have shaped me through **ministry, teaching, and study**, especially through Christian Leaders Institute and North Central Theological Seminary. I remain grateful for every teacher, pastor, mentor, and fellow laborer who helped deepen my understanding of Scripture and strengthen my calling to serve.

To the many readers of my devotionals over the years, thank you for welcoming these reflections into your mornings, your evenings, and your prayer lives. It is a humbling gift to know that words written in quiet places have been read by others walking their own roads of faith.

I also carry gratitude for the saints, writers, pastors, and faithful believers—both living and departed—whose witness continues to encourage the church. Their lives have often reminded me that hope, prayer, perseverance, and returning light are not merely themes for a book, but the steady pattern of Christian discipleship.

Finally, I give thanks for every season of life that has helped shape these pages: for the bright days and the dark ones, for the mountaintops and the wilderness stretches, for grief and healing, for questions and quiet answers, and for the abiding faithfulness of God through them all.

May all thanks and glory be given to Him.